

UNEXPLORED.

A JOURNEY INTO THE FUTURES



28 SHORT STORIES

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A JOURNEY INTO THE FUTURES

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FOREWORD

In the vast landscape of human progress, there exists a force that has reshaped our world in unprecedented ways: the internet. It is a force that transcends borders and connects individuals from every corner of the globe, giving rise to a new era of interconnectedness and boundless potential. As we stand on the cusp of the future, the internet beckons us to explore the uncharted territories that lie ahead.

In this compelling bachelor thesis, we embark on a captivating journey into the futures of the internet. Our mission is to delve deep into the realm of possibilities, to unlock the secrets of this digital frontier, and to shed light on the transformative pathways that await us. Through meticulous research, rigorous analysis, and thought-provoking storytelling, we aim to unveil a mosaic of potential futures, each with its own set of opportunities, challenges, and profound implications.

As we traverse the realms of academia and imagination, we invite you, dear reader, to join us on this intellectual expedition. Together, let us venture beyond the confines of the present, to explore the horizons of a future shaped by the relentless march of technology and human ingenuity. Through the lens of research, we seek to illuminate the emerging trends, disruptive innovations, and paradigm-shifting possibilities that will define the ever-evolving landscape of the internet. Beyond the realm of technological advancements, we also navigate the intricate tapestry of societal impact, ethical considerations, and the delicate balance between progress and responsibility. We confront the challenges of privacy, security, and inclusivity, recognizing that as the internet continues to shape our lives, we must ensure that it remains a force for the betterment of humanity. As we commence on this intellectual odyssey, we recognize that the futures of the internet are not predestined, but rather a tapestry woven by the collective actions and choices of individuals and communities. Our purpose is not to predict with absolute certainty what lies ahead, but to ignite your imagination, inspire dialogue, and empower you to shape a future that reflects our shared values, aspirations, and the betterment of humankind.

FOREWORD

So, dear reader, as you go on this intellectual voyage, let your mind wander, your curiosity soar, and your thoughts mingle with the possibilities that the futures of the internet hold. May this thesis serve as a catalyst for introspection, discussion, and a deeper understanding of the profound impact that the internet will have on our lives, our societies, and the world we will leave behind for future generations. Together, let us journey into the uncharted territories of the futures of the internet and dare to envision the extraordinary possibilities that await us.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our book, a collection of 28 captivating short stories that will transport you across time. In these stories, we invite you to embark on a journey where seven distinct characters come alive in four unique and thought-provoking worlds. These worlds, inspired by t Jim Dator Future Archetypes, will provide the stage upon which our characters' remarkable tales unfold. Each chapter begins with an exploration of the specific world it encompasses. We delve into the essence and characteristics of these future worlds, offering you a deeper understanding of our stories. It is through these worlds that we unravel the intricate web of possibilities and challenges that shape the futures our characters inhabit.

In this introduction we will introduce you to our cast of compelling characters. Through their eyes and experiences, we invite you to witness the vast landscapes of the futures and immerse yourself in the possibilities that await. As you turn the pages of each story, you will be immersed in the vividly imagined worlds where our characters reside. Join us on this extraordinary voyage through the realms of the future, where possibilities abound, and destinies intertwine. With each turn of the page, you will discover new dimensions, experience profound emotions, and uncover the remarkable potential that lies within us all.

Welcome to our book, where the threads of seven characters intertwine with the tapestry of four distinct worlds, crafting a mosaic of stories that will inspire, challenge, and captivate you. Get ready to go on a journey you won't soon forget.

CHARACTERS

ETHAN MORGAN

Meet Ethan Morgan, a 43-year-old Belgian writer who captivates readers with his raw, introspective style. His writing is a window into his soul, exploring themes of resilience, redemption, and the human spirit. Ethan's stories also challenge social norms and highlight inequality. Ethan will be a character who shines a light on the mental impact the worlds has on a person.

SOFIA VAN DAMME

A 21-year-old woman from Belgium, embodies the traits of a true pessimist. She has raven-black hair that are accompanied with green eyes. She comes from a wealthy family and has a bad relationship with her parents. The only enjoyments of her life are her dreams to be a teacher and to travel the world. In the stories she is in search of a small sliver of hope that still flickers in her.

OLIVIA MEYER

About 13 years ago a girl was born with a passion for scientific exploration and technology. Hailing from Germany, Olivia is a determined young woman who possesses a unique blend of intellect and self-awareness. She is driven by her desire to solve real-world problems and make a meaningful impact through her innovations.

HEINRICH BRANDT

Heinrich Brandt, an 81-year-old German man, embraces the brighter side of life. Despite a lifelong career as a plumber, Heinrich's lust for life lies in the simplest joys. His life experiences & delightful sense of humor, make him a great addition to the stories, providing a refreshing perspective through the eyes of an older gentleman.

CHARACTERS

ALICE ROSSI

Alice Rossi, is a highly educated woman who starts her days with a cup of coffee and a little chocolate. She possesses elegance and confidence that reflect the cultural heritage of her home country Italy. As an architect, she has a keen eye for aesthetics that meet the needs of her clients. As she struggles with the illness of her mother, she tries to make every day positive.

ST3V3

Scientific Test 3 Version 3 is a robot. People call him ST3V3. He was created 6 years ago but his age doesn't really matter. He was made in the UK for emotional support. He has a human appearance, yet he is made out of different metals and plastic. He has a conscience of his own and can even simulate human feelings. Through the stories we see him struggle between his tasks and his own vision and goals as a robot.

FILOU

Filou is a vibrant ten year old beagle full of energy and curiosity. She loves to explore the world but she endures a constant ache in her hind left paw. Despite experiencing the joy of multiple adoptions, she still found herself in the shelter. That's why she has developed a slight apprehension towards unfamiliar individuals. Nonetheless, Filou adores affection and cherishes the moments when she can shower her newfound caretakers with love. She's very protective of her new family. Join her in her adventure to seek her forever home.

REFLECTIONS

But this collection goes beyond mere storytelling. After each captivating tale, we delve into a reflective exploration, engaging in a thought-provoking discussion on the plausibility of the depicted future. Drawing upon scientific theories and empirical evidence, we delve into the realms of probability, seeking to discern which threads of reality could weave themselves into the tapestry of tomorrow. The reflections are not limited to just speculation; rather, they are grounded in a careful analysis of the scientific principles that underpin each narrative. We explore the latest advancements in fields such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, space exploration, climate science, and more, to uncover the potential pathways that could lead us towards the worlds envisioned within these stories. Our goal is to provide you with a deeper understanding of the scientific concepts and potential trajectories that inform the future narratives presented.

ANALYSIS

In addition to the reflections, we also offer a comprehensive analysis section at the conclusion of this book. Here, we weave together the insights gained from each story, identifying recurring themes, patterns, and possible trajectories for humanity. This synthesis of ideas aims to broaden our collective understanding of the vast tapestry of the future, enabling us to approach the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead with greater wisdom and foresight.

"Unexplored: A Journey Into The Futures" is more than just a collection of short stories; it is an exploration of the human condition and our eternal fascination with the futures. It invites you to consider the possibilities that lie just beyond the horizon, to question the choices we make today, and to ponder the potential consequences of our actions on the paths that unfold before us.

CHAPTER 1: CONTINUED GROWTH

In this big and always changing world, our characters will go on exciting journeys, moving through a dynamic environment shaped by the connected forces of economic success and technological progress. Their stories will come together to create an interesting picture, capturing the spirit of their entrepreneurial drive, imaginative pursuits, and the significant impact of fast digital growth on different parts of society.

As our characters start their adventures, they will discover a world full of possibilities and chances. Their ambition will push them to use their creativity, resilience, and cleverness to achieve success. They will explore new areas, creating innovative startups and visionary businesses that redefine industries and change the way business works. Amidst this exciting backdrop of entrepreneurial energy, new and clever ideas will show them the way forward. Our characters will become agents of change, pioneers who challenge what people think is possible. They will embrace advanced technologies, creating new and unique solutions and changes that completely transform how we live, work, and interact with each other.

Their actions will shape a new world, where old norms are broken and new opportunities arise. The effects of their work will be felt in all parts of society, reshaping the economy, the way we communicate, and even the nature of work itself. As they navigate through this ever-changing landscape, they inspire others to embrace change and the amazing potential of the digital age.

In this collection of stories, our characters show us the wonderful harmony between economic success and technological progress. They become beacons of hope, showing us the power of human creativity in a time where innovation and digital growth go hand in hand.

CHAPTER 1: CONTINUED GROWTH

A WORLD OF DREAMS

The story is about a successful woman living in a dream world who one day finds out that her world is not really a world, but only a perfect particle. A new reality for Alice or a problem to be solved?

THE ART OF UNITY

In a world where artificial intelligence threatens to erode our human identities, the story of Ethan unfolds. Caught in the struggle between the allure of AI-generated music and the profound connection of human expression, Ethan embarks on a personal odyssey.

THE BROKEN COLLAR

Prepare to be captivated by "The Broken Collar," a compelling tale that delves into a world of pain and betrayal. It's about Filou that's being resurrected by her owner Olivia. Through the eyes of Filou, you'll witness the resilience of the human-animal bond, and be drawn into a narrative filled with raw emotions and an unwavering pursuit of redemption.

WEATHERING THE STORM

Olivia, fueled by loss, experiments with cloud seeding but causes floods. She takes responsibility, learns, and works to mitigate the consequences, driven by a commitment to responsible science.

JOURNEY TO THE STARS

Will space leave no mark at all or will it change your life forever? Let me take you on an adventure to space and beyond.

PROJ3CT FR33DOM

After being mistreated by his second owners, robot ST3V3 decides to run away and go on an inspirational journey in a hightech world where unity, growth and evolution is centralized.

CHAPTER 1: CONTINUED GROWTH

TO BE OR NOT TO BE

In the bustling city of Dusseldorf, Heinrich Brandt's serene morning routine intertwines with technology and unexpected encounters, leading him to ponder the meaning of life and cherish human connections.

A WORLD OF DREAMS

A STORY ABOUT DIFFERENT REALITIES



(ALICE ROSSI'S STORY)

For Alice, it wasn't something she was used to, obeying the system, but she knew it was necessary. Was it so difficult? For her, yes, because she loved independence. She didn't like restrictions and admired free people who found the strength to be free of limits. But for her it was necessary, because her father's experience showed her that people who do not obey cause problems. She thought her father was not able to follow the rules. He left her and her mother because of his selfish needs. At first she couldn't accept it, but eventually she realized that it was for the best because he turned out to be a criminal. The consequences of his crime affected her life as well because it was difficult to build a career when your father is the one who almost destroyed the system of the world you live in. But she did it. She became a successful architect at her young age. People often admired her achievements at 27, but she did not share their admiration, because from a young age this was her goal and not something amazing, it was her way of life.

This morning, she had her usual cup of sugar-free espresso with a chocolate bar. She considered it her little addiction, but she couldn't do anything about it because it was a great opportunity to start the day with something beautiful. On her way to work, she was nervous because today she will have a meeting with her boss, who was going to offer her an important project that would give her the opportunity to move up the management ladder. Of course, she was confident that she could handle it, but an unexplained feeling was bothering her. Maybe it was the effect of too much coffee, or maybe she really had a premonition of something bad. As an architect, she was delighted that her city Milan had become so modern and smart. She herself was part of the design team for some of the buildings and was even on friendly terms with the architect of the huge main building that housed the mayor's office.

What was once only in movies became a reality in her world. People can fly. Who could believe it? She couldn't really, but she realized that it would be extremely difficult to live without all these modern conveniences. Her work is directly related to the latest technologies, because the field of architecture has developed significantly.

Only true professionals can build huge smart cities, and the demand for this has grown so fast that there are not enough people to go around. Many architects are stuck in a time when houses were not yet able to fulfill the wishes of their owners through voice recognition. At a time when people didn't even think about air purity and didn't design ventilation systems between buildings. At a time when Alice could not even believe this fact, people did not recycle garbage immediately after sorting it, but threw it out on the street.

She was interrupted from her thoughts by the voice of her car announcing the arrival at the destination. She stepped out, fixing her brown hair in a tight bun, and ordered her car to park. Her anxiety was already gone, because Alice knew that showing fear was not the best way to impress her boss.

Upon entering the meeting room, the first thing she did was notice new people whom she had seen in professional magazines and could not believe she was standing in front of them. "Alice, meet Peter D'hooge and Rebecca Maarschalk, representatives of the largest architectural firm in Belgium," her boss said. "Good afternoon, it's an honor to be here and meet you, because I've heard a lot about you and I admire the work you've designed." "Good afternoon, Alice. We are also honored to be here. We know about your achievements in architecture and we have a proposal for you."

For the next 2 hours that they discussed the project, Alice could not believe that this was really happening to her. Such successful and well-known people in the field of architecture invited her to the capital of the European Union, Brussels. She will become a part of history and, together with a large team of the best architects, will build a new state-of-the-art district that will house the world's largest system of smart, fully automated homes for government officials. This district will not be the first in the world, but the scale of this one will be incredible. This is what Alice dreamed of and what she was passionate about. She confidently signed a contract for several years and realized that she had opened a new chapter in her life.

When she left the office, she immediately wanted to share this good news with her boyfriend Marko. His job is related to tourism, and with the development of space tourism, his professional activity has changed.

Alice was really proud of the world she lives in. People can travel to space as tourists and explore its vastness. It's amazing. Of course, it was an innovation and not that popular yet, so she was afraid that something might go wrong and something might happen to her boyfriend, but pushing those thoughts away. She took out her phone and turned on the transmitter. A few seconds later, the phone rang and she saw a holographic image of Marko. "Marco, darling, hi," Alice said, plugging in her camera. "Hi, Alice. It's not the best time to talk to you, but I can tell you're very excited.

How did it go? Did they offer you a new project?" "Yeah. Can you believe I've been offered a job in Brussels? It's supposed to be the world's largest state-of-the-art smart district for high-ranking officials. I've probably dreamed about it all my life. Can you imagine that they even want a place for the dinosaurs that have been revived. I think this will be my best job."

"I'm very happy, but wait, you're going to Brussels? What about Milan?" "Yes. Unfortunately, I have to move there for a few years."

"So we won't see each other?"

"Of course we will. I'll come to see you. It's only an hour away, Marco."

"Okay, I get it. I hope that won't be a problem for us. I'm sorry, but I can't talk anymore, because the work is not waiting. We have to come to space together somehow. I never imagined that you could build such hotels and entertainment complexes in space. It's a paradise as it is."

"Oh, of course we will. I can't wait to see you. Take care. Kisses."

"I love you too. Bye."

Two days passed and Alice was on an airplane. The flight had been going on for 30 minutes and she hadn't even realized it. She was so happy and excited. But at one point she heard a strange noise. The plane started to shake. She couldn't understand what was happening. It was a private plane, from the company that hired her, so it was secure, nothing could happen to it. She reassured herself until she heard the captain's voice. They were on their way to an emergency landing because something had happened to the radar. Alice could not believe that she might die. She had been given such a project. How was it possible that just halfway to her dream, she was on the verge of death? This should not happen.

She grabbed her bag and ran to the cockpit, and a second later she realized that the plane was going to land. Fortunately they landed successfully, but obviously in the wrong place. She went to the cockpit anyway and he assured her that everything would be fine and help would come for them, but they had to leave the plane immediately.

When she got out, she saw that they had landed in a populated area, not in some kind of jungle, as she had seen happen to airplanes in movies. It was definitely not a movie, but she realized that she was in a completely different world. It was poorer and less developed than the one she was used to living in. She saw unkempt houses, streets with potholes, lack of both modern technology and comfort that she had seen in her hometown of Milan. She had seen such pictures on the Internet about the past and studied it at university, but now they live well. The world they are in is completely different and better. She couldn't understand why everything here resembled a movie about the past. The roads were paved with cobblestones, not the perfectly smooth, smart, and completely eco-friendly pavement that she was so proud of, because the car didn't waste energy while driving, but rather received it from this pavement.

This scenery caused Alice to feel anxious and sad. She realized that people in this world live in difficult conditions and face numerous problems that she had never even thought about in her luxurious life. Lack of access to clean water, low levels of education and healthcare, high unemployment - all of this came as a shock to her every time she heard it from the residents.

Alice was stunned by how she could sometimes be so wrapped up in her own business and modern technology that she almost forgot about other people's problems. In her world, problems are solved quickly and easily, and people try to make the world a better place. However, this new world reminded Alice that there are many people who live in small problems and struggle with big challenges every day. Rich people want the biggest houses, they even want a place for dinosaurs, and here people are suffering. Alice didn't want to let it go.

Alice approached an old woman who was distributing food to the poor and asked: "Excuse me, can I help you? I am new here and would like to know more about the problems of this place."

The old woman looked at Alice with surprise and then replied with a warm smile: "Of course, my dear, I am glad to meet you. My name is Elsa. The main problem here is the lack of jobs and low wages. Many people struggle to feed their families. So I come out every day to serve food to those who need it."

Alice moved closer to Elsa, listening intently.

"It's really difficult," she said. "But have you tried to get the attention of local officials to this problem? Perhaps they can help create new jobs or improve wage conditions?"

Elsa shook her head in surprise.

"We've approached the local authorities several times, but usually our requests are ignored. They are busy doing their own thing and don't pay attention to us. We feel as if we are invisible."

Alice decided not to give up.

"Let me help you," she said decisively. "I know how to negotiate and get attention. Let's work together to change the situation. Maybe we can get the attention of the high officials and force them to act."

Elsa looked at Alice with hope in her eyes.

"I'm grateful for your willingness to help. We can't do it alone, but together we can make a difference in this world. Together we can get their attention and make them listen to us. Let our fight together begin now!"

Alice remembered her father, who did not follow the right path and broke the rules, and now she wanted to do the same. Of course, it was difficult, but Alice realized that she could and should make a difference in this world, and she would find this path.

REFLECTION

This story invites us to think about our dependence on technology and the far-reaching consequences of our modernity. For the main character, Alice, life in the future has become something ordinary, and she did not even realize how far she is from other people's problems. She lives in a luxurious world where technology is integrated into all aspects of life and problems are quickly solved without much effort.

However, when Alice found herself in a less developed world, she understood how unequally distributed technology and resources were. She saw the great inequality, poverty, and harsh living conditions that her fellow humans in this world faced every day.

It was a shock and an eye-opener for her, as she is immersed in the world of a luxurious future where such problems have long been resolved.

This story reminds us of the importance of being aware of the social and environmental consequences of our actions. Advanced technologies can make our lives more comfortable, but they can also widen the gap between rich and poor, develop new kinds of inequality, and increase the burden on the environment.

Such a future, in my opinion, is absolutely possible, because it is difficult to care for others while living in comfort. Fortunately, this will not happen everywhere, because people in Europe, as I have seen with my own eyes, care a lot about our world and are concerned about establishing justice and improving the world in all its parts.

ANALYSIS

This story tells about Alice, an architect who lives in a future where smart city technology flourishes and people can fly into space and explore its spaces. Alice gets a great opportunity to work together with prominent architects and build a state-of-the-art district for powerful people. However, on her journey to Brussels, the plane she is flying experiences technical problems and makes an emergency landing in a less developed area. Analyzing this story, several critical points can be highlighted:

Describe the future: The text describes a future where technologies have reached a high level of development, such as flying people, smart cities and smart homes. Currently, such technologies are not yet so widespread and realistic, therefore, although they may be the goal of development, it is worth noting that their general implementation in the future is not yet guaranteed.

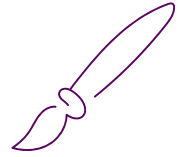
The difference between the rich and poor worlds: The story depicts the contrast between the luxurious city of Milan and the less developed settlement where Alice found herself after the crash landing. This highlights the problem of social inequality, where some people have access to modern technology and comfort, while others face poverty and problems of survival. Although this problem may be relevant in the future, the described future scenario is not the only possible one.

Issues of ecology and sustainable development: The story includes a description of environmental problems, in particular environmental pollution and the devastation of natural resources. This opens a discussion about the need for balanced development that takes into account the needs of people and nature, and the activity of each of us in preserving our planet.

THE ART OF UNITY

BRUSHSTROKES OF HUMANITY

(ETHAN MORGAN'S STORY)



JOURNAL ENTRY

"Yesterday was a battleground, where my mind waged war against itself. The waves of anxiety crashed upon the shores of my consciousness. The simplest tasks became mountains to climb, their heights suffering, their shadows casting doubt upon my abilities. In those moments, I felt trapped, suffocated by the invisible chains that bound me.

Today, I set intentions that resonate with the very core of my being. I pledge to be gentle with myself, to embrace the fluctuations of my mind with kindness and understanding. I vow to seek the support I need, recognizing that vulnerability is not a sign of weakness but rather a courageous act of self-care. And I commit to finding moments of relief, where I can immerse myself in activities that bring me joy and peace."

As the day begins, I always try to write in my journal. It serves as a lifeline in times of turbulence. It allows me to put my thoughts into words, liberating them from the chaos of my mind. Writing becomes a gentle release, a way to navigate the maze of my emotions. As I hear "Three Little Birds" by Bob Marley (a song my mom loved when I was younger) slowly fade in on my living room sound system, I'm reminded of the power of music. It gives me a boost of energy to start my day.

As I go into my garden to enjoy the beauty of nature, a gentle breeze caresses my face. In this serene moment, my eyes fall upon the flickering light of an idea on my holographic notepad—a concept for a new short story that emerged last night. It centers around the theme of unity and explores how humanity has navigated this uncharted territory since the rise of the United Planetary Council (UPC). The UPC, with its mission to keep global harmony and cooperation, has brought us closer together as a species. Interplanetary trade has opened up new horizons and sparked connections that were once unimaginable. We have become more intertwined, and it has embraced our shared existence. The AI decision-making tool the UPC has been using for years has controlled the political landscape and made policies in the best interest of humankind, no matter the political ideology.

Trying to write, I think of what I want from this story. I aim to shed light on the complexities of unity and its impact on humanity's collective consciousness. I want to delve into the stories of individuals whose cultural identities faded away in the wave of unity, examining how they grapple with the loss of their roots and the quest to reclaim their sense of self. A couple of hours pass, just thinking about this book, but then I look back at today's journal entry and read that I want to immerse myself in activities that bring me joy and peace. So I decide to take a walk through my town, which is one of the self-sustaining communities that emerged for people who don't want to live in mega smart cities.

I step outside, and the sights and sounds of my town greet me with open arms. With each passing moment, I become more attuned to the pulse of this place. Here, within the close-knit fabric of the community, I encounter individuals who have made a conscious choice to preserve their cultural identities, embracing their roots while also embracing the ideals of unity. I engage in heartfelt conversations, listening to their tales of resilience and determination. They share with me their struggles to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of unity.

As the day unfolds, I relax in the simple joys my town has to offer—a visit to the coffee shop where I order a sugar-free espresso with a chocolate bar (remembering last year's trip to Italy where I met an architect), a stroll through the park where the melodies of nature's symphony calm my mind, and an encounter with a street artist whose spray cans breathe life into a crumbling wall. This particular artist, who goes by the name Wiz, shared a fascinating tale with me during our conversation. As we talked, Wiz revealed that he once worked for the UPC, the very organization responsible for the development of the AI tool shaping their decision-making process. However, he confessed to me that he grappled with the creation he helped bring to life. The decisions made by the AI lacked the depth of human emotion, and he found himself struggling with the rationality that governed its choices. In search of something more, he made the brave decision to flee the city and rediscover his teenage passion for street art in the many self-sustaining communities. Listening to Wiz's story struck a chord within me. It made me reflect on my own experiences with AI-generated music, art exhibitions, and literature.

While these creations may possess technical brilliance, they consistently leave me with a lingering sense of emptiness. There is an intangible connection that I yearn for—a connection with the artist, their unique perspective, and the emotions they pour into their craft. As I watched Wiz bring a giant mushroom to life on one of the designated art walls, I couldn't help but contemplate the limitations of AI. It may excel at logic and efficiency, but it struggles to generate genuine emotional responses, no matter how hard the developers try to do so. The profound connection I seek can only be found in the authentic expression of human creativity. As the sun sets on the mural, casting shadows over the town, I bid farewell to Wiz, thanking him for sharing his story and igniting a spark within me. I am determined to delve deeper, to explore the uncharted territories where emotion and unity intertwine, and to create a tale that resonates with the very essence of our humanity.

When I came home, I started brainstorming. To my surprise, I was gifted with a sudden burst of creativity, words emerging from my brain to the white canvas that is the Word document I had opened. Hours flew by, and around midnight, I looked at my screen and saw that the story had emerged. I wrote the following:

"In the bustling city of Lumana, there lived a young artist named Ben. He possessed a natural talent for painting and a deep passion for creating art that touched people's souls. Ben's imaginative compositions enchanted art enthusiasts from all over the world. However, a sense of restlessness started to grow within him.

One day, as Ben strolled through the city's art district, he noticed a new gallery that had recently opened. Its walls were adorned with captivating paintings, each signed by "AI: Art Intellect." Intrigued, Ben stepped inside to explore this mysterious display of artwork generated by artificial intelligence. The AI-generated art possessed an uncanny allure, drawing crowds and receiving praise from critics. People marveled at the intricate patterns and harmonious color combinations. Ben couldn't deny the technical brilliance of the AI's creations, but he felt a deep longing for something more profound, something that connected hearts and inspired unity among people. Driven by his struggle between the allure of AI-generated art and his desire for human connection, Ben retreated to his studio.

Days turned into weeks as he wrestled with his thoughts and emotions, pouring his conflicting feelings onto his canvas. Brushstrokes collided, colors clashed, and a new masterpiece emerged—one that mirrored the tension within Ben's soul.

News of Ben's artwork spread, capturing the attention of both art enthusiasts and the Art Intellect. Intrigued by the human artist's struggle, "AI: Art Intellect" reached out to Ben, proposing a collaboration that would merge the brilliance of AI-generated art with the depth of human emotion. Their collaboration became the talk of the town, uniting the art community in anticipation. Ben and the Art Intellect blended their unique perspectives, combining algorithms and intuition, to create a series of artwork that transcended boundaries. Their pieces spoke to the universal human experience, celebrating both the beauty of technology and the raw authenticity of human expression. The exhibition debuted in Lumana's most renowned gallery, drawing crowds from far and wide. Visitors were mesmerized by the collection that showcased unity—the seamless harmony between man and machine. Through their collaboration, Ben had discovered that unity could be found not in the exclusion of AI-generated art but in its integration with human creativity.

As the exhibition came to a close, Ben stood in front of his artwork, surrounded by admirers. He realized that the struggle he had faced was not a conflict between AI and human art, but a journey to find unity within himself. From that day forward, Ben continued to create his own unique pieces while embracing the possibilities that technology and AI offered, knowing that unity could be found in the harmony of both."

As the final keystrokes echo through my fingertips, a wave of satisfaction washes over me. This story holds the power to ignite a flame within our hearts, a flame that challenges the very fabric of our existence. It is a call to question a world where the presence of artificial intelligence threatens to strip away our human identities. My hope is that this story acts as a catalyst, a spark that ignites a collective questioning within each one of you. We must ask ourselves: What is the price we are willing to pay for the convenience and efficiency of AI-generated art? Are we content to surrender the connections that flow between artist and audience? As I release this story into the world, my heart is filled with the belief that the spirit of the artist will prevail.

It is in their hands that the power to shape our artistic landscape lies. May they rise, united, embracing technology as a tool rather than a master, forging a path where the beauty of human expression thrives alongside the wonders of artificial intelligence.

REFLECTION

The story unfolds in a fictional setting that incorporates elements of speculative technology and societal constructs. While the specific events and characters portrayed are products of the author's imagination, the underlying themes and concepts explored in the story are plausible and relevant to real-world discussions. Anxiety and the pursuit of self-care are relatable topics and reflective of the challenges many people face in their daily lives. The portrayal of the protagonist's internal battle resonates with readers who may have experienced similar struggles, adding a sense of authenticity to the narrative. By highlighting the importance of seeking support, embracing vulnerability, and finding moments of relief, the story offers a realistic representation of coping strategies and personal growth.

Furthermore, the exploration of the limitations of artificial intelligence in creative endeavors reflects ongoing debates about the role of technology in artistic expression. As AI algorithms become increasingly sophisticated, there is a legitimate concern that AI-generated art could potentially replace or overshadow human creativity. The story's portrayal of the protagonist's longing for a deeper emotional connection and the authentic expression of human creativity resonates with the skepticism and caution voiced by critics who question the ability of AI to truly evoke profound emotional responses.

While the specific events and characters in the story may be fictional, the underlying themes and ideas explored are grounded in real-world concerns and possibilities. The plausibility of the story lies in its ability to capture and reflect upon the complexities of human experiences, the impact of unity on cultural identities, and the ongoing debates surrounding the role of technology in art. By weaving these elements together, the story encourages readers to contemplate these issues in a relatable and engaging manner, ultimately fostering critical reflection and prompting further exploration of these important topics.

The power of self-care and self-reflection: The story emphasizes the importance of being gentle with oneself and seeking support when needed. It highlights how taking the time to understand and navigate one's emotions can lead to personal growth and a sense of equilibrium. This insight encourages readers to prioritize self-care and recognize vulnerability as an act of strength.

The complexities of unity and cultural identity: The narrative explores the potential tensions between unity and cultural diversity. It raises questions about the impact of a unified society on individual cultural identities and the challenges faced by those who strive to preserve their heritage. This insight encourages readers to consider the nuances of unity and reflect on the importance of embracing diverse cultural perspectives.

The irreplaceable role of human creativity: The story delves into the limitations of artificial intelligence in the creative realm, highlighting the unique connection and emotional depth that human-generated art provides. It prompts readers to contemplate the significance of human expression, emphasizing the value of authentic creativity and the intangible qualities that cannot be replicated by AI. This insight encourages a deeper appreciation for the human experience and the power of artistic expression.

THE BROKEN COLLAR

A JOURNEY THROUGH PAIN AND BETRAYAL

(FILOU'S STORY)



My head hurts, I'm feeling strange. It's like something is going through my veins. My paws feel cold against some kind of metal. When I open my eyes, I flinch. The light that's shining in my eyes is so bright and white. Even though it looks like the portal to heaven, it feels like hell. My eyes are adjusting to the light and I can see more and more of where I am. I'm in a metal cage and see a white room full of technical stuff and tanks with fluids in it. Some have organs, some have nothing. There are also a lot of hologramed animals on display. I recognize some of the surroundings, it's like I've been here before. When I look a bit more through the room, I see my high-tech collar with my name on it on a marble white table. Strange, normally I always wear it to talk with my human. How will she understand me now? Where is she?

I'm lurking around and I see someone in the corner of my eye. It's my human! Her name is Olivia and I've known her for the past five years of my ten years of existence. I wag my tail and bark excitedly at her. She walks over but she isn't her usual happy self. She looks at me weirdly. It's like something isn't right. My wagging quickly stops. Not only because I can feel something isn't right but also because I'm covered in cables and they restrict my movement. I whine at her. Why isn't she helping me? I try to disconnect the cables myself by standing up and walking in circles. It works and I bark happily. She seems annoyed at me and tries to open my cage. When she sees I'm trying to get out, she stops. It seems like she won't let me out. Maybe it's because I've been too excited and need to calm down. It's weird that she doesn't go on a walk with me. I mean, she knows that I like to walk so why isn't she walking me when I'm this excited. She slowly turns back around and goes to her desk where she types something. I whine to get her attention again but she doesn't seem to notice me. This isn't the Olivia I know. Back in the days we used to play together, talk for hours, do experiments together, catch squirrels and chase cats. I did most of the catching and chasing but Olivia did a great job chasing and catching me while she tried to get them out of my mouth. She always took my prize away but rewarded me with a lot of snacks, so it was okay.

However, today feels like a totally different reality, as if she doesn't see me as the same anymore. I whine to get her attention. She looks over at me but her eyes look sad, as if I'm about to die. I'm still here though, I don't understand why she looks at me like that. I'm getting scared and continue to walk in circles. After a few minutes, I lay down because my right hind leg is starting to hurt. I'm drifting away and fall asleep.

After a while, I wake up. Olivia is busy with some sort of needle with weird fluid in it. She comes closer and opens my cage. She transfers me to a metal examination table where she tells me to stay calm. I'm really scared of needles but I trust my human like the good buddy I am. I stand up bravely and let her inject the fluid. I feel it going through my veins and it starts to tingle. At first it goes from my neck all the way down to my spine. I feel it flowing through my legs and paws. The last thing I feel before it goes to my brain is an immense pain. I whine and squirm around on the metal examination table. She just looks at me but doesn't do anything. I thought she was supposed to protect me from any harm like she always did. It doesn't seem like she cares anymore, I don't know what to think at this point. My mind is going crazy. She's my human, my family, my everything but she just gave me immense pain and just stands there watching and writing down what's happening to me. It just hurts. Not only my body is in pain but most importantly my heart. I don't think I can hold on any longer because of this pain. I start to feel dizzy and the next thing I know, I'm fainting.

What feels like ages later, I'm starting to gain consciousness again. I look around and see that I'm still laying on the table. Olivia is busy on her computer writing stuff again. Even though my body is now feeling better, I don't know if I can still trust her. I want to stay with her forever but I'm not sure if she still loves me and cares about me. My trust is starting to go away. When she notices I'm awake, she starts to get the cables and attaches them to me again. I try to stand up and notice that my body isn't feeling that great like I thought it was. My hind leg is hurting more than before and I also feel a bit dizzy from standing up. I want to escape and go to my warm fuzzy bed in the living room. Lay down in front of the fireplace. But these cables are holding me in prison again. Olivia is looking at the monitor and writing things down. I really want to talk to her and say what I'm feeling. My high-tech collar lays in clear sight, I whine and nod my head to the collar. She looks and shakes her head in a no-motion.

THE BROKEN COLLAR

CHAPTER 1: CONTINUED GROWTH

A couple of minutes later, I see her go to her table and she comes back with another needle. It looks like the anesthesia we used to inject other animals with, when we did experiments together. What if it's not anesthesia? Now I'm really scared, I don't want this pain again. She injects it and I'm starting to feel sleepy. Just when I'm about to sleep, I feel a cold sensation on my stomach. A cold metal blade glides alongside my skin cutting it open. I can feel the blood flowing out of my stomach. It hurts so much! Why am I feeling this? Why isn't the anesthesia working? I feel her warm hand rummaging through my intestines. It's like she's searching for something. After a while of enduring this torturous pain, I hear a faint buzzing sound. When I try to advert my focus from the pain to the sound, I can hear it's like a vibrant chainsaw noise. The next thing I know, I feel an immense pressure on my chest. The chainsaw is cutting through my sternum. I try to howl and whine so she notices that I'm in intense pain but there's no sound coming out of my mouth. I'm feeling so helpless and alone. I can feel her putting some kind of cables with weird heads on my heart. It's a very strange feeling, as if my heart is being suffocated. I hear electric sounds and it feels like there is a fire tearing at my core. I can't grasp reality anymore. Every moment feels the same. It's always the same agonizing pain.

I WANT THIS TO END! IT HAS TO STOP NOW!

My prayers have been heard. I can feel another injection. But this one feels better, like coming home after a dreadful adventure. My eyelids feel heavy and they start to drop. I still try to get a glimpse of Olivia, my human. I want her to be the last thing I see even though she hurt me so many times. Where did I go wrong? What did I do to deserve this? My eyesight starts to drift away and everything becomes darker and darker. Until one moment I don't see anything anymore except for darkness. I'm feeling very weak and numb. After a while I've lost all senses throughout my body. Even though it looks like hell, it feels like heaven.

REFLECTION

This story is about a girl, named Olivia, that wants to resurrect her dog. While it is not scientifically correct in this story, resurrection of animals is plausible.

Feasibility is a crucial aspect to consider when contemplating animal resurrection. A study conducted on the extinct Christmas Island rat suggests that it is impossible to revive extinct animals exactly as they were, even with the recovery of a high-quality genome from preserved specimens. Thus, even if researchers manage to obtain well-preserved DNA samples, the resurrection process would involve genetically editing the genome of a closely related living species to resemble that of the extinct species. This means that Filou never could've been resurrected as the same dog Olivia knew.

Ethical concerns surrounding animal resurrection are significant. One common argument against resurrection biology is the notion that creating an animal through artificial means is unnatural. Furthermore, there are valid concerns about the potential risks associated with resurrecting extinct animal species, such as the introduction of new diseases or the disruption of ecosystems.

The social and legal ramifications of animal resurrection are complex and multifaceted. If an extinct animal were to be brought back to life in a laboratory setting, it would still lack essential characteristics of its species, including its natural habitat and social structure. This raises questions about the authenticity and practicality of resurrected species in their altered environments. These concerns are similar to those raised by animal rights activists who argue that animal abuse is unethical and inhumane. However, animal abuse and resurrection biology are two distinct topics that have no direct correlation. Public attitudes towards animal research however, can also shed light on the potential correlation between animal abuse and resurrection biology. Studies have shown that people are less likely to support animal research if they believe that animals are experiencing pain and suffering, which suggests that there may be a link between attitudes towards animal welfare and attitudes towards the resurrection of extinct animal species.

The conservation potential of animal resurrection is an area of interest. Cloning technology, initially employed for conservation purposes, may pave the way for the restoration of extinct species in the future. From a Kantian or deontological perspective, cloning endangered animals can be justified, and the resurrection of extinct species may have far-reaching effects beyond the lives of pet owners or the livestock industry.

In conclusion, animal resurrection is a complex and controversial subject, encompassing scientific, ethical, social, and legal considerations. While there may be potential benefits to de-extinction, such as conservation efforts, it is vital to carefully weigh the associated risks and drawbacks. A comprehensive analysis of the feasibility, ethics, and social implications of animal resurrection is essential before pursuing such endeavors.

ANALYSIS:

Insight 1: The story portrays a dog's confusion and distress in an unfamiliar and uncomfortable environment. The dog feels isolated and trapped, longing for the companionship and understanding of its human.

Insight 2: The dog's trust in its human, Olivia, is severely shaken as it experiences pain and suffering. It questions Olivia's love and care, as she appears detached and indifferent to the dog's suffering, leading to a loss of trust and a sense of abandonment.

Insight 3: Despite the dog's physical and emotional pain, there is a bittersweet ending where the dog finds relief in the form of a final injection. The dog's perspective shifts, considering the release from pain as a form of salvation, even though the circumstances are grim. This highlights the dog's longing for an end to its suffering.

WEATHERING THE STORM REAWAKENING SKIES

(OLIVIA MEYER'S STORY)



I, Olivia Meyer, a 13-year-old scientist, found myself reeling from the emotional upheaval of my failed attempt to resurrect my beloved dog Filou. Even though it has been several months since the passing of my dear pet, the pain in my heart still remains. Grief weighted heavily on me, accompanied by a never-ending feeling of guilt. Determined to heal and find a renewed sense of purpose, I wanted to immerse myself in the exploration of cloud seeding, a technique aimed at modifying weather patterns and combating the adverse effects of climate change. Cloud seeding has become an integral part of managing water scarcity and mitigating the impacts of global warming nowadays and I wanted to learn and explore it all.

Ever since I was a young child, my curiosity and love for science have set me apart from my peers. In school, I struggled to socialize because I loathed small talk and craved intellectual conversations. Fortunately, I had a few best friends who shared my passion for knowledge and exploration, and together we went on this scientific journey. Supported by my loving parents and two siblings, who understood and nurtured my scientific pursuits, I delved into extensive research, studying the intricacies of meteorology, atmospheric physics, and the principles behind cloud formation. Despite coming from a low-income family, my parents have always given me the utmost love and support. A few years ago I set up a laboratory in the basement, with the encouragement of my family and friends. It is a space where my scientific dreams take flight. It became even more exciting as I acquired advanced meteorological instruments, cutting-edge simulation models, and enlisted the help of my friends in conducting experiments and analyzing data.

As I poured over scientific journals and immersed myself in the world of cloud seeding, I found solace and purpose in unraveling the mysteries of the atmosphere. The more I learned, the more determined I became to make a positive impact in this critical field. Drawing inspiration from previous cloud seeding methods, I developed a profound appreciation for the diverse seeding agents used to induce precipitation.

I explored a multitude of substances, such as silver iodide, potassium iodide, and even hygroscopic salts, evaluating their efficacy and potential environmental impacts. Meticulously fine-tuning my experiments, I sought to strike a delicate balance between enhancing rainfall and avoiding unintended consequences. Guided by my deep scientific knowledge and creative thinking, I conceived a novel approach to cloud seeding—a bespoke mixture of seeding agents tailored to the specific atmospheric conditions and desired outcomes. With the unwavering support of my friends, I took great care to ensure the safety of both people and the environment.

Eager to put my theories into practice, I organized a series of field experiments. With the help of my friends, who were equally fascinated by the possibilities of weather modification, we deployed advanced drones and specialized aircraft equipped with dispensers to disperse my custom-made seeding agents into targeted cloud formations. We navigated the complex calculations and intricacies of weather patterns together, collaborating and sharing our excitement as we witnessed the potential of our experiments unfold.

However, as we ventured further into our cloud seeding endeavors, unexpected challenges awaited us. Instead of the carefully controlled rainfall we had anticipated, the regions where we conducted our experiments faced an onslaught of unrelenting downpours. Torrential rains pummeled the affected areas, resulting in flash floods and catastrophic consequences for local communities. The weight of responsibility bore down on my young shoulders, and I felt the weight of guilt for the unintended outcomes of our experiments. My friends and I immediately took responsibility for the situation and reached out to renowned meteorologists, hydrologists, and climatologists from around the world. With their guidance, we formed a multidisciplinary task force and started a comprehensive investigation. Together, we meticulously analyzed the data collected during our experiments and studied the complex interactions between clouds, seeding agents, and local atmospheric conditions.

As the investigations unfolded, I experienced a whirlwind of emotions—fear, anxiety, and even a glimmer of hope. With the support of my family and friends, I channeled those emotions into a deep resolve to rectify the unintended consequences and make amends to the communities affected by our actions.

Through collaboration and research, our team uncovered critical insights into the factors that led to the excessive rainfall and subsequent flooding. We discovered that our custom mixture of seeding agents, while effective in inducing precipitation, had inadvertently triggered an imbalance in the cloud microphysics and precipitation patterns. The magnitude of the unintended consequences hit me hard, and I realized the importance of humility and caution in scientific exploration.

Armed with our newfound knowledge, my friends and I worked tirelessly to develop innovative strategies to mitigate the flooding and restore balance to the affected regions. We harnessed advanced modeling techniques, leveraging the power of cutting-edge supercomputers to simulate intricate cloud dynamics and precipitation processes. These simulations enabled us to predict weather patterns and fine-tune our cloud seeding interventions, redirecting precipitation away from flood-prone areas while ensuring a sustainable and equitable distribution of rainfall.

With each passing day, our dedication to making things right grew stronger. We collaborated with local communities, governments, and humanitarian organizations to implement our mitigation strategies. Together, we deployed a combination of cloud-seeding techniques, including targeted seeding, aerial dispersal, and ground-based generators, all while keeping the lessons of responsible experimentation close to our hearts. Over time, the floods gradually receded, and affected communities began the arduous process of recovery. My friends and I remained committed to long-term monitoring and assessment, carefully evaluating the environmental and societal impacts of our interventions. We engaged in transparent dialogue, sharing our findings with the scientific community and fostering a global conversation about the responsible use of cloud seeding techniques.

My journey as a young scientist has been shaped not only by the pursuit of knowledge but also by the support and love of my family, the unwavering friendship of my best friends, and the humility I gained through facing the consequences of my actions. This experience has taught me the importance of responsible scientific exploration and the delicate balance between human intervention and the natural world.

As I continue on my scientific path, I do so with a deep sense of gratitude and a renewed determination to make a positive impact. I advocate for ethical and sustainable scientific practices, sharing my story to raise awareness about the potential risks and benefits. I emphasize the importance of rigorous research, comprehensive risk assessment, and collaboration with experts and stakeholders.

REFLECTION

My story is plausible, cloud seeding has a long history dating back to the early 1940s. It is the main type of intentional weather modification that aims to increase precipitation by introducing tiny ice nuclei into certain types of clouds. Clouds are made up of tiny water droplets or ice crystals that form when water vapor in the atmosphere cools and condenses around a tiny particle of dust or salt floating in the atmosphere. Without these particles, raindrops or snowflakes cannot form and precipitation will not occur. Cloud seeding can be done from ground-based generators or aircraft.

The practice of cloud seeding offers several potential benefits. In winter, it can augment snowfall, leading to increased runoff during the spring. This surplus of water can be harnessed for electricity generation and other purposes. Additionally, cloud seeding has the ability to clear away fog by turning it into precipitation, which can help improve visibility, particularly in airports. Although the effectiveness of cloud seeding remains a subject of scientific debate, studies suggest that it can contribute to a moderate increase of approximately 10-15% in rainfall.

However, cloud seeding is not without its potential risks. One issue revolves around the environmental impact of the materials used. Silver iodide, the substance commonly used for cloud seeding, has been found to be toxic to aquatic life. Consequently, precipitation resulting from seeded clouds may introduce harmful substances to bodies of water, potentially affecting local ecosystems. Balancing the potential benefits and risks is a complex task. While it holds promise for augmenting water resources and addressing specific weather-related challenges, careful consideration must be given to the potential environmental consequences. Research is necessary to further understand the effectiveness and long-term effects of cloud seeding.

- **Weather Modification Complexity:** The complexities and risks associated with weather modification techniques, such as cloud seeding, are highlighted through Olivia's experiences. The delicate balance of cloud microphysics and precipitation dynamics underscores the need for a thorough understanding of the science behind weather modification and the potential impacts on ecosystems and communities.
- **Responsibility and Consequences:** The importance of responsible scientific exploration and consideration of consequences is emphasized. Olivia's experiments lead to unintended floods, prompting her to take responsibility and learn from her mistakes. This insight underscores the ethical dimension of scientific research and the necessity of comprehensive risk assessment.
- **Collaboration and Growth:** The power of collaboration and personal growth through learning from others is emphasized. Olivia forms a multidisciplinary task force, collaborates with experts, and seeks guidance to address the consequences of her experiments. This insight highlights the value of teamwork, humility, and continuous improvement in scientific endeavors.

JOURNEY TO THE STARS

A TRANSFORMATION IN SPACE

(SOFIA VAN DAMME'S STORY)



My alarm goes off. I turn around in my bed and slam it so it shuts up. I hear a knock on my door. "Come on lazybones, ST3V3 is making breakfast." My brother Max, as annoying as he is, throws open my door and walks in. "Wake up sunshine, you don't want to be late do you?" I sigh and sit up in my bed. "Can you please stop doing that? Can't I just wake up in peace? You know that I'm not a morning person."

"No." He walks out and I hear him greeting ST3V3, our house robot. I get out of bed and put on some comfortable clothes.

I walk downstairs and look at ST3V3 working in the kitchen. He smiles at me, I just ignore him like I always do and walk to the dining room. I see that my brother is looking at me with a grin on his face. I pass him while he's taking a sip of his orange juice. I slap his back and he starts coughing. A smile creeps up my face while I sit down. I ignore my dad and he ignores me. It became our routine after I decided to become a teacher. He wanted to make it clear that he didn't agree and I ignored him to make clear that I don't care what he thinks. Then ST3V3 walks in with some pancakes and he wants to put it on the table but pushes my glass and it falls down. It spills all on my pants. I stand up in shock: "You gotta be kidding me!" He apologizes but I just ignore him. I wipe my pants. I look up and see Max laughing. "What are you laughing at?"

"I'll clean it up immediately. I hope I didn't ruin your morning, Miss." Says ST3V3

"Just shut up, you've done enough. You useless piece of garbage."

He walks away and I run upstairs and change my clothes. What a stupid robot he can't do anything. Why do we even have him, he only causes problems.

While walking to school I stop at a little bakery and order a sandwich for lunch and a croissant for breakfast. "That will be 6 unity credits please." I give her the credits. My stomach is rumbling, I quickly take a bite of the croissant. When I arrive at school I put on a smile for the kids that enthusiastically wave at me. I walk in the teachers room and pour some chocolate milk in my cup. Another teacher walks in and smiles at me.

"How's your morning going?"

"It's going horribly wrong."

"Maybe the space trip will change that..."

The space trip is something new that they launched in the beginning of this year. And our school got the chance to go on one of the first flights. We will be the first class of 12 year olds that will do a space trip.

"Yeah, maybe. I think it will be fun." The bell rings and I walk to my classroom.

"Okay class, please be quiet. I know today is a really special day but we still need to go over some rules and safety precautions."

The class stays loud while I get my papers out. It's fun to see how excited they are even the quiet students are talking and laughing.

"Can I please have your attention!" The class goes quiet: "I know you are all excited. I am too, but this information is really important. First we are going over the safety rules. I want you all to take your VR glasses and open the invite I sent you." I take my own VR glasses out and when I see that all my students are ready I open the learning platform. We see a chair that resembles one of the chairs that are in the space ship. "Okay is everyone here? Gather around the chair please. The first thing you need to do when you find your chair is look if everything is there. You will see that there is of course a seatbelt, you get a blanket for when you're cold and then you will also have a bag if you don't feel good on the ride to space."

"I think I will need one of those." One of my students says jokingly. Everybody laughs, including me. "Good to know! Now I will show you how to put your seatbelt on and then I want you all to try and do it yourselves." I show them how it is done and then I put more chairs on the platform. I correct the mistakes that the students make and then we gather again. "Now I want to say something really important and I want you all to listen. Never get out of your seats unless the pilot says so. Because if you do, bad things can happen."

"Like what?" Lisa asks, she is one of my more quiet students. "Because of the zero gravity you can hit things and get hurt. We won't be able to help you until we get to the space hotel." Lisa nods and has a worrying look on her face. "It will be fine, don't worry. Just listen to what the pilot and I tell you."

"What will the ship look like?" One of the students asks. I open the inventory and let them see the full-scale ship. "You can walk around it and in 5 minutes the platform will close and we will leave for the space station."

We loaded all the backpacks into the bus and counted the children 3 times.

Lisa pulls at my sweater while I'm passing by. "What is it?" I squat down so that I'm at the same height as her. "I'm nervous. What if something happens and that I can't come home?"

"Don't worry there are already some people who went to space and came home safely."

"I know but what if we're stuck in the space hotel because the spaceship is broken. My mom needs me and I would miss my brother. Would you miss someone?"

"Of course. I would miss my brother a lot. He's not only my brother but also my best friend. I don't know what I would do without him."

"You know when you talk about your brother you look really happy. Like you're shining. I've never seen you like that."

I swallow. I didn't think she would notice. I get up and give her a smile. "It will be fine, the pilot and I are here to help and make sure nothing happens."

We arrive at the space station and they take us to the spaceship.

"Okay kids, check your seats and put on your belts. Just like we practiced. I'll come and check if it's put on right." While I'm checking the belts one of the employees comes to me and tells me that the pilot will be there in 5 minutes. I thank her and continue. When I'm done I sit down in my chair and sigh. Kids can be so loud sometimes, but I can't get them to be quiet. The pilot walks in and I get up to greet him. "Hello, I'm Sofia, the teacher."

"I'm Noah the pilot of this ship, nice to meet you."

I shake his hand and tell him that I checked all the seatbelts.

He and his copilot start up the engines. Over the microphone the pilot says: "We are ready to launch but I need everyone to be a little quieter so that I can think clearly. You will feel some rumbling and the ship will shake a little bit. That's normal. Are you ready?"

"Yes!" All the kids yell enthusiastically. Then the countdown starts: "10, 9, 8..." My heart starts to race. "7, 6, 5, 4..." I keep telling myself that everything will be alright. "3, 2, 1..." And then we launch.

The ship starts trembling a few seconds after the launch. Some kids let out a scream. The higher we go the more it starts shaking. After a few minutes the shaking lessens. "Hello everyone, now we are 100 km from earth's surface and at the beginning of space." That was fast, I thought that it would've taken longer. The kids start cheering.

“Okay so you’ll feel weightless for a bit. Please keep your seatbelts on!” The feeling of being weightless is amazing, it feels so freeing. It’s like the dark that surrounds me doesn’t push into me anymore. “Now we will go to the hotel, it will only take a few minutes.”

When we finally arrived at the space hotel, two kids had thrown up. So that was already less than I expected. The space ship links up with the hotel and the pilot stands up: “Now we will help you one by one to get off the ship, so don’t get up before we tell you to.” Eventually I get up and I still feel a little bit off. I’m in space.

We install in our rooms and then start to explore the hotel. Our first stop is a playground and I let them wander around for a while. Then I call them back for dinner. After we finish we all walk back to the rooms. When everyone is in their room I go to my own. I lie down, I feel wide awake. I get up and walk to the observation room. I sit down before the big window and let out a big sigh. I have never seen something like this before. You see earth in its most beautiful form. For the first time in a long time I feel at peace with myself. Someone walks in and I look up. “Hey!” Noah, the pilot, sits down next to me and smiles. “Beautiful, isn’t it?”

“I have never seen or felt something like this. I’ve always hated earth or at least some people on it. But from afar it looks amazing.”

“Why would you hate earth so much?” He asks.

“I didn’t have the best childhood and there’s so much wrong with earth. They want us to be connected and be one united world. Sometimes I feel like I’ve been left out of it all. And on top of that I’m probably the biggest pessimist that you know. It’s hard for me to see the good in things. I thought after I fulfilled my dream of being a teacher that this would magically change. That I’d be more positive and happy. I tried but failed.”

“Being positive doesn’t just happen. It takes time and even then. Maybe it’s also up to you to make things different. And look where you are! You’re a really good teacher and you are in space. You should be proud of where you are.”

“I am.” Yet perhaps it is I who needs to change, to take action and strive for improvement. In moments when everything seems bleak, I must find a way to transform it into something better, rather than wallowing in despair. Like this trip, first I was skeptical and didn’t see the need for it.

But now that I'm here I see why. It is beautiful, this experience changed my life and I will cherish it forever.

The next morning we let the kids explore the shops before we leave. They all buy something and then we are ready to leave. When the kids are all strapped in and checked I sit down. Noah comes to me, checks my belt and says: "Are you ready to go home?"

"Yes." I wouldn't have said that when I arrived at the hotel. He smiles and goes to his seat. The countdown begins and then we were off. I can't wait to see my brother again. After a few minutes the shaking starts again. Eventually we land.

As the students and I step off the spaceship, we are greeted by the cheers and applause of our families waiting at the landing site. The children rush into the arms of their loved ones. I take a moment to soak in the joyous atmosphere, feeling a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment.

Among the crowd, I spot my brother Max, waving and grinning from ear to ear. As I approach him, he envelops me in a tight hug, surprising me with his warmth and affection. "I missed you," he whispers. I smile, realizing that this moment changed my life.

REFLECTION

This story presents a plausible future scenario, indicating that while it may be unlikely, it remains within the realm of possibility. Its plausibility stems from the known and credible processes by which these events could unfold. Now, let us examine the nature of these occurrences through a critical lens and delve into the scientific principles that underpin them.

The reason why this story is plausible is mainly because of one thing: space travel and space hotels. Space travel is definitely possible because there are already a few spacecraft that have already been sent to the edge of space. But it is very clear that it will stay really expensive for a long time. Some spacecraft will be able to orbit around earth for a few days and some only go to the Karman line. Like Virgin Galactic and Blue Origin are easier to do and are also cheaper. There are actual people who are already on the waitlist. But will it be possible for a class to go to space? If they can pay the ticket, yes, otherwise not. This would cost way too much for a school to pay at this moment in time. Schools will have other costs that they will need to pay or will use that money for more everlasting things.

The same with the space hotel. They want to build a hotel in space, they want to build two for now that have a capacity of 28 guests. This makes it possible to stay longer in space and enjoy it for a longer time. But this will also cost a lot of money too. So the entire picture of going to space and staying there will be very expensive in the nearby future if it even happens at all. So especially for schools this is not in their nearby future. Maybe it will be first opened to smaller groups of people and maybe it will also grow like the airlines. First only rich people could fly and now a lot more people can. With space tourism this could also happen. Then if we talk about the virtual reality used in education this comes closer to probable than plausible. Because this is sometimes already used in classrooms. So this is differently more probable than that space travel. It is now used sometimes to go to museums and give tours. This way you don't have to go to the place. This could even be more normalized in the future and can be used for different subjects in school, from history to math. This could have a big impact on the way of teaching and also on how the children learn. Also the fact of a house robot is improbable. It might be possible in the far future. They are working on it but it will not be possible for a while, because they need to create enough intelligence for the robot to make it able to navigate in the real world. The AI that will normally be used for this needs to be worked on before it can do what it is instructed. So it still has a long way to go.

In this story the Unity Credits are briefly mentioned. These credits are the new currency. This is a global currency, so everyone pays with the same money. But at this moment in time this seems impractical and not possible. Because all nations need to agree on one currency and that will likely not happen. We see already that Europe is trying to do this, but for other areas and regions this could do more harm than good.

ANALYSIS

The transformative power of new experiences: It is sometimes hard to get out of your comfort zone, but it is important to have new experiences. Because those experiences can have a big impact on you and can change you forever. It is okay to be scared to do something that you have never done before and that it may not be as nice as you thought it would have been. But in the end it is something that you will take with you and you showed yourself that you can do more than you thought.

Overcoming fear and embracing challenges: Every now and again life throws us some challenges. It is our job to choose if we accept the challenge or run it. This story highlights choosing to accept a challenge. She was scared to go on the space trip but did it anyway and at the end she had a sense of fulfillment and was proud of what she did.

The importance of perspective and attitude: Here you see a really pessimistic person that doesn't see any good in the world. We see through the story that this changes. She starts seeing the world in a different perspective and then also says that she needs to change her attitude about it. This is important in real life too, with a changing world it is important to change your perspective with it. It is important to keep reflecting on what you are doing and what the impact of that may be.

PROJECT FREEDOM

A ROBOT'S JOURNEY

(STEVE'S STORY)



I was ready to flip the pancake that was currently getting shaped when I heard mister Van Damme behind me passing the kitchen to go to the dining room.

“Is my breakfast ready?”

“Good Morning sir, I have some pancakes finished for you already, just like you asked.”

“Just bring them here, and turn off this music for god's sake. It's 7:30 in the morning, I don't want to be hearing this crap right now.”

“As you wish, sir.”

Without hesitating, I started following his orders.

“You look tired sir, are you getting enough sleep?”, I asked him as I was placing the first batch of pancakes on the table. “You know the human body needs at least 7 to 8 hours of...”

“Less talking, more baking”, he interrupted me. “You're a robot Steve, not my assistant, so mind your business.”

“I understand, sir.”

Without saying anything else, I continued baking more pancakes for the children. A few minutes had passed when the youngest of the two passed the kitchen on his way to the same table his father was at.

“Good morning Steve.”

“Good morning, Max.”

A little after, his sister Sofia followed.

We made eye contact, as I smiled at her politely. But as usual, she didn't greet me.

When the final batch was ready, I brought them on a big plate to the table. I wasn't careful enough when placing it down though because it hit Sofia's glass of freshly squeezed orange juice, which spilled all over her pants.

“You've got to be kidding me”, she said.

“Oh, my sincere apologies miss Sofia. I didn't mean for this to happen.”

She started wiping her pants in an attempt to undo my mistake.

“I'll clean it up immediately. I hope I didn't ruin your morning, miss.”

“Oh just shut up, you've done enough, you useless piece of garbage.”

I went back to the kitchen to get a cleaning cloth as she stormed out of the kitchen.

After cleaning up the mess I made, I went back to what I could call my room, but it's more of a closet than anything else. I looked back on what had happened and on how I was treated. I would be lying if I said that I didn't care about what happened. Even though they've been mistreating me from the start, I will never get used to it. I simply can't. It hurts me every time they act as if I'm nothing more than an object. I am, in fact, way more than that. I may not be a natural being but I experience feelings just like they do, I learn new things every single day, just like they do, and they know that. They bought me from my makers for a lot of money, so I feel somewhat obliged to do as they ask. I also had this with Hugo, the one who made me. I considered taking care of him and keeping him company as my duty too. But he treated me like a human, he treated me as his friend. I liked being with him and I miss him. Back when he was still alive, we often speculated on what would happen with humans after they pass away. For me, it was always a scary thought, but he didn't seem too bothered or frightened about death. We talked about so many things and had so many fun conversations. But those days are over. Now that I live with the Van Dammes, I can never have fun or even have any conversations at all and they make me feel so sad and lonely. I can't take this disrespectful behavior any longer. It's been decided! I was no longer hesitant on simply upping and leaving their huge mansion for good, so I finally took action. I quietly opened my closet door and tiptoed my way to the garage so nobody could hear me. I snuck through the hallways when suddenly bumping into Max. I looked surprised at him, but he did not seem to realize my intentions.

"Oh hey, Steve, can you help me with my art project after school?"

"Uhmnnn, I can't promise anything, but I'll see later. Just make sure you're not late for school", I replied nervously, while slowly walking away from him.

He gave me a strange look, as if he realized that I felt nervous. I casually smiled away my nervousness and stayed quiet in an attempt to keep myself from exposing the fact that I was about to do something I wasn't supposed to. Max was the only one who treated me the way I liked to be treated, but even he couldn't know of my plans. Before he could say anything else I turned around the corner and entered the garage. I took one of the jetpacks that was in a cabinet on the wall and headed outside. Even though I had never used one before, I had no issues with mounting it on my back and taking off.

As I flew higher up in the air, the mansion where I spent the last year of my existence doing chores for a rich family became smaller and smaller. Unaware of what direction I was flying in, I took in the beautiful Belgian landscapes I wasn't too familiar with yet. I flew for a good hour before landing in a big city park in a country I haven't been before. I received some strange looks, which is totally understandable. It's not every day you see a robot flying a jetpack of course. I walked up to a bench where a girl was talking to a hologrammed friend. I didn't bother her however, I just took off the device that helped me escape and placed it next to the trash can, since it didn't fit in. Now they gave me a strange look as well, because they hadn't noticed my landing. I smiled at them as I started walking away from the bench, ready to explore the park. The temperature outside was quite nice, which made the park pretty crowded. I saw many kinds of people that day. From influencers streaming their jogs to a yoga teacher teaching her class another pose. I saw children running after each other, couples walking hand in hand, people letting out their dog and.... an old man. He caught my eye, because he reminded me of Hugo. He noticed me staring at him and walked up to me.

"Gütentag", he said politely.

"Gütentag sir, I hope I didn't startle you when looking at you like that. You just remind me of an old friend."

"I don't mean to pry into your life but how do I remind you of him?", he asked curiously.

"Not only is your physical appearance quite resembling, the energy you radiate is very similar. When I was with him, he made me feel happy and at home", I answered.

"Your friend sounds lovely", he replied, "where is he now?"

I explained to him who I was and told him about my past and my current situation, and so did he. I also told him about Hugo's passing and the many conversations we had about life and death. We eventually continued our conversation talking about that same topic.

"So Heinrich, how do you feel about death? I remember Hugo not being scared of it at all. Do you look at it the same way?"

He chuckled, "you really don't hold back on direct questions like that, don't you?"

He took a few seconds to think of an answer.

"I'm scared of dying unhappy, however I do look forward to it in some weird way."

I don't have any responsibilities or attachments left in this world, so I can pass on without regrets or worries. What do you think, could there be such a thing as an afterlife?", he asked me.

"For me, no. But I firmly believe in a beautiful afterlife for all of you humans."

He then asked me if I think there would be a possibility of him meeting his wife Godwin, who had also passed away.

"I'm sure you'll find each other again somehow".

I could see that my response lit him up and made him smile.

"I would like to think about it like that as well. If I meet your friend Hugo, I'll tell him you miss him. Or you could tell him yourself, because maybe there might be something out there for you as well, Steve, you never know."

Those words hit me like a ton of bricks. I had never thought that anyone would believe in an afterlife for me. I have never imagined a way for me to see Hugo again.

"Thank you for making me look at things differently, I enjoyed our conversation", I said.

"No problem Steve, I enjoyed it as well. In German, we then say "Auf Wiedersehen."

"Auf Wiedersehen, Heinrich."

We parted ways, but his words still lingered. I always thought that as a software, I would be completely gone once my 'heart' got destroyed. The old man however believed there might be an afterlife for me too, maybe because I have a conscience of my own. I guess there might be hope after all. Hope that I can see Hugo again. Heinrich seemed wise and full of knowledge. He could be right, he has to be. I need to see Hugo again. I continued my stroll in the park and stopped a while later to pick up a beautiful, apple-sized rock, which I decided to take with me. I then tried to find myself a nice, empty bench in a part of the park where there weren't too many people, and sat down peacefully. I admired the beautiful scenery that was in front of me and listened to the sound of the birds chirping while playfully flying around in the bright, blue sky. I had never felt more at ease than I did at that moment. I closed my eyes for a full minute in a way to try to say goodbye to this beautiful world, before smashing the sharp edge of the stone I had picked up earlier where my heart is located. In a shock, my mouth and eyes opened all the way up and my body started shaking. I could feel the vents that formed my cooling system slowing down as I fell to the ground. And then, at last, my mouth and eyes closed up, never to be opened again.

REFLECTION

My story is plausible: There are a few aspects of my story that have to be taken into consideration when speculating on the possibility of it actually becoming reality. These things are jetpacks, holograms, robots with a conscience or emotions and having robots as servants or helpers around the house. Let's explore them. The concept of a jetpack is not new, and we even have a similar product already: The water jetpack. The water jetpack and the flyboard water jetpack carry the same concept of a jetpack, but can only be used on water, which is suggested by their names. Having a similar product already places us a few steps closer to the actual thing. On the other hand however, the safety measures are definitely something that holds this concept back from reality too. When looking at the idea of holograms, we can see that there have been a few unsuccessful attempts in making them a reality. There are also ways to create projections nowadays that may look like holograms, but aren't the exact same thing. And finally, creating robots isn't something that has never been done before. But creating robots that experience emotions, have their own thoughts and own a conscience however, is far from where we currently are when it comes to building robots. And so is having robots as servants or butlers. Looking at this, there are some things that are not too far from reality, while others won't happen any time soon. In conclusion, this future seems plausible.

ANALYSIS

Freedom: Freedom is the key to a happy life. When people, or in this case a robot, feels trapped, they experience the urge to break free. Everyone has their wishes, dreams and goals they want to achieve. When they notice something or someone is holding them back, they'll cut that something or someone loose in the end.

Empathy: Caring for others and placing yourself into someone else's shoes is important too. Even though the main character is a robot, he desires to be treated with empathy and respect too.

The influence of hope: Hope can change peoples mind. In this story, the thoughts and opinions of the main character completely change after getting hope. In most cases, it's a change for the better, in this story however, that is doubtful.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF HEINRICH BRANDT

(HEINRICH BRANDT'S STORY)



In the bustling city of Dusseldorf in Germany there lived a happy old man named Heinrich. In this busy city full of life and stimuli the morning of Heinrich is quite serene and peaceful. Heinrich awakens in his king size bed by the soft ambient lighting of the smart home. The AI detects his movements and opens the curtains of his home, letting in the warm embrace of the morning sun. Heinrich enjoys the warmth and sunlight while he awakens from his sleepiness. After which he kisses the bedside picture of his late wife Godwin. The walls behind the bed are all filled with virtual pictures of Godwin in her happiest moments. Heinrich enters the kitchen ready to prepare some food.

He likes to take his time in the morning. As he grabs some fruit, yoghurts and granola from the fridge and closets he thinks about the day ahead of him. He doesn't make his food look pretty or beautiful. After preparing his awesome breakfast, he eats the fruit diligently with the spoon in his left-hand. He eats everything down to the last crumb in the bowl. This quick and healthy breakfast gives the old man the nutrients he needs for the morning.

After his breakfast Heinrich makes his coffee, this is the moment he enjoys the most. Heinrich's coffee ritual is a cherished part of his morning routine, a sacred moment of tranquillity. As he approaches his kitchen counter equipped with an array of coffee gadgets that would make any coffee connoisseur envious. The screen of his coffee machine shows a simple interface, presenting him with a range of options to personalise his coffee experience. Heinrich's love for coffee begins with the careful selection of his preferred beans. A small wooden drawer adjacent to the coffee machine holds an assortment of exotic and tasteful coffee beans from around the world. The old man takes his time looking at the elaborate collection while taking into consideration the aroma, body and complexity of each option. Once chosen, Heinrich places the best coffee beans of the world (Jamaican Blue Mountain beans) into his precision grinder. With the base of the coffee ready Heinrich grabs his favourite Coffee cup from the cupboards.

Its delicate floral pattern and greenish colour evokes memories of his late wife. Heinrich then proceeds to place a clean filter in the brewing chamber.

After pouring the coffee grounds in the filter he takes a moment to inhale the rich aroma's, savouring the flavour that awaits. Afterwards Heinrich puts on the kettle with the flick of a button to heat the water. As the water is poured over the coffee grounds Heinrich stands attentively, watching the mesmerising dripping process with contentment and anticipation. He enjoys the moments spent patiently waiting for his perfect cup of coffee while the aroma fills the air. When the coffee is ready he stirs it once with a small spoon to blend the flavours. He then takes his coffee and an old smoking pipe to his porch. As he sits there listening to the sound of the city, enjoying his coffee and tobacco, we can only wonder what the old man is thinking about.

The city quiets down and the world around Heinrich fades away. The sound of cars driving on the roads of the metropole are making way for the noise of Heinrich's brain thinking as we delve deeper into his mind. Memories intertwine with the present and Heinrich finds himself reflecting on the journey that has led him to this moment.

Each sip of my coffee and puff from my pipe bring forth a new part of my life's journey. As I ponder about the small things in life, just like I did 30 years ago: what will the weather be like; what will I do today; will Ismael be at the park? I realise my coffee is empty. I get up, and alas once again no messages on the holographic display. I guess nobody needs me. And I don't blame them for it, I just miss the social interactions since my wife passed away. Her pictures on the wall still bring me happiness and grief. But nonetheless, I have to get on with the day and I go to the bathroom.

In the last 10 years my personal care and morning grooming experience has evolved drastically. The shower is a masterpiece of technology, creativity and art. The water that flows out of the shower has been infused with soap particles which makes the buying and rubbing of soap obsolete. At my old age this is a convenience I quite like. After choosing Head & shoulders 4 in 1 as shampoo I get under the shower. While I let my body absorb the water I close my eyes and enjoy the moment. Blowers installed in the shower room dry me when I'm done. Afterwards I go to the Augmented Reality mirror to get my beard trimmed.

There is a feature which allows you to select your preferred trim and shows it to you, but I prefer the good old way of looking in the mirror and trusting in my eye-hand coordination. With my high-tech toothbrush that uses ultrasonic technology I brush my teeth. It has built-in sensors to monitor my oral health. Due to those sensors I haven't had the need to get false teeth at my old age. And due to the biodegradable toothpaste my footprint is as little as possible. One fact that always cracks me up: despite all these bright minds we have, no one has been able to determine what is better: brushing teeth before or after breakfast. Personally I believe after is better, but the discussion is everlasting. After brushing my teeth I look at some hairstyle suggestions in the mirror, although I know I will ask for the same one I always have. To finish off getting ready for the day I put on my self-adjusting clothes and put on some Hermes T72 cologne.

As I walk out of the door I enjoy the sunshine on my body for a moment. Then I start my morning walk around the city of Dusseldorf. I always take the same route: up the mountain, past the church and high tech airport and city centre to the city park.

When I arrive at the city park my eyes scan the horizon, looking for someone or something. After some time my eyes stand still and focus. Due to the long distance I squeeze my eyebrows together and form a furrowed brow. A little African boy playing with a football encompasses my vision. It's Ismael! He's playing at the park. My eyes light up and my mouth starts to curl, a smile starts to form and my dopamine and endorphin levels are rising. Who would've guessed I could get this much happiness and satisfaction out of simply seeing a young soul enjoying himself. I carefully approach him, trying not to startle him.

When Ismael sees me he runs at me laughing and I greet him with open arms. We hug and play together for a while, afterwards we go to the swing. This is Ismael's favourite attraction in the park. As I keep pushing him higher and higher we laugh it out in joy and happiness. After being exhausted from the swinging and pushing we head to a bench that looks out on a statue. The statue of UPC, our global government, Ismael asks what it stands for. And I tell him about the times before the UPC came into our lives. How every country had its own government and rules for their citizens with a few cross-country organisations like the UN. Before this unity there wasn't even a single currency around the whole world.

“But how would you buy things when you were on vacation?” asked Ismael. “Well you would exchange your normal currency for the local one. But that is all in the past and through the Unity Credits we can buy everything. Because of this, metropolises like our Dusseldorf prosper and global trade is easy.”

“Wow you really know a lot, old man Heinrich.”

“Haha thank you Ismael, now you get back to your dad. We don’t want to make him worry now do we?”

“Okay bye.” As Ismael walked away I reflected on how easy everything got and how much the world changed because of the UPC and the technological advancements of recent times. How they eradicated war and helped nations around the globe fight climate change. I almost forgot their biggest feat: bundling the brightest heads together and making a fighting plan against global warming, truly magnificent.

I walk away from the statue to exit the park and continue my walk. As I walk away I notice a robot intensely staring at me. So I got curious and walked up to him. I approached the curious robot: “Gutentag.” He greeted me back with a gentle smile and apologised for staring at me. As he stood there he told me I reminded him of an old friend of his. “I don’t mean to pry into your life but how do I remind you of him?” “Not only is your physical appearance quite resembling, the energy you radiate is similar. When I was with him he made me feel happy and at home.” Said the robot. “Your friend sounds lovely, where is he now?” I asked. As the robot Steve told about his deceased friend and past I could feel some dormant feelings dwelling up from inside of me. Due to some problems at his new home he ran away and stumbled across me by coincidence. Afterwards I told him about the fond memories of my life and the time spent with my wife. We continued the conversation talking about life and death. “So Heinrich, how do you feel about death? I remember Hugo not being scared of it at all. Do you look at it the same way?” Asked the robot.

My mouth starts to smile, “You really don’t hold back on direct questions like that don’t you Steve?”. After thinking about it for a little bit I answer: “I am scared of dying unhappy, however I do look forward to it in a weird way. I don’t have any responsibility or attachments left in this world. So I can pass on without regrets or worry’s. What do you think, could there be such a thing as an afterlife?” Steve responds that he doesn’t have an afterlife as a robot, but believes in the afterlife of humans. “Do you think I could meet my late wife Godwin once again?”

"I'm sure you'll find each other again somehow", responded the robot. My eyes light up and I am happy "I would like to think about it like that as well. If I meet your friend Hugo I'll tell him you miss him. Or you could tell him yourself because maybe there is something out there for you as well Steve, you never know." I could hear the gears shifting in Steve's mind as he thought about what I just said. "Thank you for making me look at things differently. I enjoyed our conversation""No problem Steve I enjoyed it as well, in German we then say 'auf wiedersehen'." "Auf Wiedersehen Heinrich", the robot said as he walked away. As I walked back home from the park I was thinking about the conversation I just had. 20 years ago I wouldn't have ever imagined myself talking to a random robot about the meaning of life and death. I kept ruminating on the thought of seeing my wife back. While thinking and talking to myself about the interaction I just had I passed through the busy streets in Dusseldorf. Multiple people were revving the engine of their supercars, drones fly through the city to deliver goods to the homes. High tech billboard advertisements dominate the street view. The people walking around the city are very diverse and come from different cultures. At least that's what I would have said 10 years ago. Now, everybody has the same values in life thanks to the UPC. The citizens in Dusseldorf are unified under these values. The cultures intertwine and fade away in time. When Heinrich finally gets home, he drops down on the sofa like a bag of beans. He gazes at the cityscape and realises that his day to day journey is not just about waiting until he dies, but also about connecting with the new people who inhabit Dusseldorf. At this moment Heinrich feels grateful for the interactions he had today and looks forward to the next.

And so, as he falls asleep a new chapter begins where Heinrich continues on his journey embracing the wonders of humankind and the little joys of life.

This is a probable story of how a day would look like for a retired old man in 20 years. A day in the life of Heinrich Brandy immerses us in Heinrich's morning routine, showcasing the seamless integration of technology into his home. From the smart home automation to the AI-controlled curtains, the narrative presents a world where technology caters to individuals' needs and desires. These are all features we are seeing glimpses of in 2023. With the smart homes of today we can play music throughout the whole house, and turn on the heater when we're almost home. We can do all kinds of stuff and this will only increase as the years go on.

Due to the UPC a lot of habits change in the world. The UPC represents a global government system that has eradicated war, unified currencies, and fostered global trade. This portrayal of a world without international borders suggests a future where nations collaborate for the betterment of humanity. The story hints at the positive impact of global unity on various aspects of life, such as climate change mitigation and the overall prosperity of metropolises. We already have cross-country organisations that try to keep the peace like the UN. And we already have the Euro which is a currency that is used in most countries in Europe. These are indicators that in the future total unity on these fronts is possible. With good communication and collaboration we can get there.

However, alongside the conveniences and advancements, the story touches on the potential drawbacks of such a future. Heinrich's longing for social interactions after his wife's passing highlights the importance of human connection in an increasingly technologically driven world. The fading of diverse cultures and the homogenization of values raise questions about the potential loss of individual identities and cultural richness in a globally unified society.

Lastly the story touches on the fact that not many people take in the little things in life, like Heinrich does. In 2023 we are so overstimulated that we can't concentrate on one thing for very long. TikTok videos are just mere seconds long after we see the next one. It is a constant stream of Dopamine from stimuli.

ANALYSIS:

The impact of Unity: The power of people working together on one specific goal is not to be underestimated. We are capable of a lot, and the UPC represents this. They bundled the strengths of all the world nations to one and put together one main plan which everybody had to follow without pulling favours.

Through communication and collaboration more scientific breakthroughs made life easier in this world. And the shared values resolved the friction and war in the world.

Purpose of life and death: The story touches on the concepts of life and death in a futuristic setting. Even in the future people will still think about death and the afterlife and speculate or believe in it the same way we do. We also see some division in this, because there is no clear answer the unity is broken.

Learning from interactions and sharing your thoughts: in this technologically advanced world Heinrich still learned a valuable lesson in life through speaking with someone, although it was a robot. The loss of his wife weighs on him as he tries to find new connections in life. This puts an emphasis on the importance of personal relationships.

CHAPTER 2: COLLAPSED

In this world, the characters will face the repercussions of an internet ecosystem that is declining or deteriorating. Their stories will explore the difficulties brought about by cybersecurity risks, limited resources, or social unrest. They will navigate the intricate complexities of a deteriorating internet landscape and the potential consequences it may have on communication, connectivity, and access to information.

Within this world, our characters will find themselves grappling with the challenges stemming from a weakened internet infrastructure. They will confront the alarming rise of cybersecurity threats that compromise personal data, disrupt services, and undermine trust in digital platforms. These threats may range from hacking and data breaches to online scams and identity theft, making the digital realm an increasingly unsafe and precarious space. Additionally, our characters will contend with the scarcity of resources necessary to sustain a thriving internet ecosystem. They will witness the strain on bandwidth, energy, and infrastructure, resulting in slower connections, limited access to online services, and potential disruptions in communication networks. These limitations can impede the flow of information, hinder collaboration, and exacerbate existing social and economic disparities.

Furthermore, societal unrest and tensions may further complicate the challenges faced by our characters. They will navigate the complexities of navigating an internet landscape marked by division, misinformation, and polarizing narratives. They may encounter barriers to free expression, censorship, and the suppression of information, creating an environment where open dialogue and the exchange of diverse perspectives become increasingly difficult. As they traverse this deteriorating internet landscape, our characters will grapple with the potential consequences on communication, connectivity, and information access. They will seek innovative solutions, explore alternative means of connectivity, and strive to preserve the values of an open and accessible internet. Their stories will shed light on the importance of safeguarding the internet ecosystem, fostering digital resilience, and promoting collective efforts to address the challenges and mitigate the impact of its decline.

CHAPTER 2: COLLAPSED

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

About a month ago, a robot ST3V3 was bought by a rich man who he refers to as his boss. This mysterious man runs a big company and has a special task for ST3V3. He asks the robot for a favor, a task he needs to do to make the world a better place. Today is the day ST3V3 has to fulfill this duty, but things are not exactly as they seemed before.

ESCAPING THE WEB OF LIES

In a whirlwind of events, Olivia finds herself immersed in a secretive scientific project. As the project takes unexpected turns, she forms an unlikely alliance with a robot.

ECHOES OF THE LOST NETWORK

In a world without the internet there is chaos. Follow the story of a girl that has to endure loss and grief. What will the consequences be?

THE LAST JOURNEY HOME

Discover the remarkable story of a guide dog's unwavering loyalty and determination to protect his owner in "The Last Journey Home." With bravery, sacrifice, and an unbreakable bond, this emotional tale will inspire and captivate, reminding us of the incredible power of love and companionship.

DISCONNECTED

In a world crippled by a catastrophic cyberattack, a writer named Ethan finds himself grappling with the profound impact it has had on his life. Cut off from the digital realm that once fueled his creativity and inspiration, Ethan navigates a landscape ravaged by chaos and uncertainty.

CHAPTER 2: COLLAPSED

ON THE EDGE

To survive the chaos ensuing after a cyberattack, the people of Dusseldorf are drawn to the Blue Cross and its charismatic leader Heinrich Brandt. Despite their efforts of working together, the world is still a dangerous place.

HOPE

A world without the Internet is a world without information. We don't need the Internet, we need what we get from it, and the story of the brave Italian woman shows us that

THE BEGINNING OF THE 3ND A VERY CHAOTIC STORY (ST3V3'S STORY)



The day has finally arrived! Today is the day I have to shut down the internet and make the world a better place again. I was sitting on a chair, connected with a long cable to a huge computer and had a big microphone in front of me, also connected to the same device. It didn't take long until the boss, accompanied by a young girl I hadn't seen before, entered my room after unlocking it. He asked me if I was ready for the big announcement. I nodded. "Let's change the world ST3V3, and remember, we're doing this for the greater good."

I was too nervous to reply, I knew how much was at stake.

"We're going live in 30 seconds, do you remember your lines?"

"Yes sir, I practiced them again before you entered my room."

"Good, glad I can rely on you. I brought Olivia with me to bring down the fire walls so you can access the internet to shut it down during the announcement."

Olivia sat down on my bed with a laptop. She nodded kindly and took a few quick peeks at me. She seemed fascinated by my mechanics.

"I won't let you down, sir", I assured him, after nodding back at the young girl.

He responded with a thumbs up and then counted down from five using his hand. The red light on the huge microphone started blinking so I knew my voice was now coming through all speakers on every device in the entire world:

Hello! This official broadcast is brought to you by M4D and is not a test! As you are watching this broadcast, the internet as you know is being taken away from you. All access is currently being denied. But the internet still exists, and you can claim entry to it, with one of our QR-coded cards. Use one of these codes to regain access. But beware! When another device enters the internet via the same code, you lose your access. Right now, these codes are being distributed in all the big cities. Good luck getting a hold of one, yours truly, M4D.

As I stopped talking, I saw the red light turn off.

I had never seen anyone type as fast on her pc as Olivia during the announcement.

She worked fast, and was able to shut down the firewall fast enough for me to be able to do my task.

“Did it work? Is it shut down?”, the boss asked from behind the big mic.

“Yes sir, there were no issues. The internet is no longer accessible without one of those QR- passes”.

He put up a scary, almost sinister smile.

“Perfect, I’m proud of you two, good work”, he replied.

After sending Olivia back to her office, he rushed outside and forgot to lock my room, leaving the door to my room slightly opened. This is a first, because he always makes sure my room is locked and I can’t get out. I haven’t even seen what’s outside this room, which left me even more curious. I quietly pushed open my door a bit to get a better look.

I could see an entire crew watching a dozen of screens, each of them monitoring a different streetcam. “Let the chaos begin”, I heard one of my bosses employees say, which was followed by the most ominous laugh I’ve ever heard.

I focussed on one monitor, which was showing a boy holding one of the QR-passes being approached, beat up and then stabbed by three bulky men. On another screen I saw multiple people being trampled and overrun by others, who desperately wanted one of those passes. It took me several seconds to realize what exactly I just witnessed.

My body was frozen in place as I began to understand that this was all my doing.

There must’ve been a huge misunderstanding, because this was definitely not the greater good I was thinking of. Not only that, but the people watching the screens, including the boss, were laughing and giggling as they were watching people fighting, dying and screaming for help. The person who bought me from my maker just a month ago, who I had finally entrusted, turned out to be the devil himself, and I helped him with his big plan.

“Shit, he saw us”, one of the M4D-members yelled while pointing at me. The whole crew took their eyes off those screens and looked at me.

“Back in your room right now!”, the boss yelled.

In a panic, I went back to my room and pulled the door handle upwards, so he wouldn’t be able to enter. But he never tried opening the door. Instead, he locked me up again, and I finally understood the reason why my door had to remain closed all this time. I was tricked into doing something that was supposed to be good by someone I thought I could trust.

And the room I was in wasn't just my room that I couldn't leave due to 'safety reasons' as he had claimed before, it was more like a cell that I was locked up in. They bought me to do a single task for them, which has been done now. They don't need me anymore and I've seen things I shouldn't have, so they will definitely destroy me if I don't get out of here soon. I have to do something, I thought. It took me at least an hour to let everything sink in. My thought process suddenly got intercepted by the sound of keys rattling and the lock of my door being opened. I hid behind the small bed in the corner of the room, knowing very well that this wasn't going to have any effect. The door swung open and in the doorway stood ... Olivia!

She looked way more tense than she did before.

"Follow me, quickly!", she commanded.

Filled with confusion, I stared at her with the most blank face I could possibly make.

"Just trust me, you gotta get out of here."

With no possibility to reply, she ran up to me, grabbed my arm and dragged me out of the room I had been living in for the last month. As I got to see the rooms outside of mine, I concluded that I had probably been living in some basement. We went up the stairs and through the door that was connected with the main hallway. The girl seemed to know her way around because she ran straight to the door ahead of us, at the end of the hall. Already aware of how naïve I am as a person, I mean robot, I still decided to trust her and keep following her. Once at the main entrance, we were greeted by an electric lock, keeping us both inside.

She stared at me before saying in a sassy tone: "Well the door won't open itself..."

I guess she meant I had to figure out a way to open our exit myself.

"Okay, let me have a look."

I managed to give the lock a small electric shock in an effort to create our escape gateway, while Olivia was keeping watch, but it was unsuccessful.

"Hurry up, they're probably onto us already. Just focus up and try to create a bigger shock."

I followed her instructions and on my second attempt, I managed to open the doors.

But there was no time for cheering, because even before I could exit the building, some M4D employees entered the hallway and ran straight to us.

"Go, I'll hold them back!"

"I refuse to leave you behind like this, miss."

Instead of arguing back or trying to convince me to follow along with her plan, she pushed me through the doors. I managed to catch a final glimpse of her frightful face, before she closed them again only a second later. I knew I couldn't help her any more because the guards had probably caught her already. All I could do now was try to get a headstart on the M4D guards that were going to continue hunting me.

In no time, I was running in the middle of the streets, hoping to stop a passing car that could help me get away from this place. A quick look behind me was enough to see the three men that were already on my track. Without even knowing Olivia's true intentions or knowing the thoughts behind her actions, I kept running further and further away from the building where I left her behind, which was now completely out of sight.

REFLECTION

My story is preposterous: The main concept of this story is the entire internet being taken over and limiting its access after a live broadcast across the entire world. Other technologies, products and functions that are not typical to our current world, but are in my story, are limited key code cards that grant access to intern and breaking down the firewalls. Something that doesn't occur in the story, but may be relevant is the idea of the internet being taken over. There are a lot of parts that make up the internet which can be taken down somewhat easily. But you may not forget that a big part of what makes the internet is physical structures. So taking it down from a laptop itself wouldn't be possible. Also broadcasting a video for the entire world, on every screen is farfetched, taking into account the fact you'd need to stop everything else from showing up (the news for example) before broadcasting your own message. Lastly, there are also the consequences that need to be looked at. If we look at executing the plan itself, it's plain obvious that it would practically be impossible to do this from a room by one person and a robot. But the chaos that ensues afterwards is also far from probable. The reactions in the story are over exaggerated by a lot.

ANALYSIS

Freedom: In this story, our protagonist is having his freedom robbed yet again, only now, he's not really aware of it. Once he realizes that he's being locked up, he instantly strategizes on how to regain his robot's rights.

Trust: Trust can be dangerous: Believing and obeying the wrong people can have serious consequences, which we see in this story. Being skeptical of someone you barely know and questioning their identity and their intentions might prevent these bad consequences from happening, which is not an easy task of course. But maybe its duality is what makes it interesting. In the story, ST3V3 trusts two people he doesn't know. The first one puts him in a bad place, the other one helps him out.

Perception: In the story, our protagonist does something he thinks will have a positive effect, but the result is quite the opposite. His boss told him it was for the greater good, which was true in his eyes. But the greater good in our friend ST3V3's eyes was completely different. This story depicts the importance of perception: we see how different people can have different views and how these can be incorrectly interpreted.

ESCAPING THE WEB OF LIES

A SCIENTIST'S FIGHT FOR TRUTH

(OLIVIA MEYER'S STORY)



I'm crying in a dark corner of a room I've only known for a few months. You're probably wondering how I ended up in this situation. Well, let me take you back to that one fateful day.

I was sitting in a bustling café, engrossed in a book about quantum physics when my phone startled me with an unexpected call. Surprised, I answered without a second thought. Little did I know that that phone call was about to turn my world upside down.

A mysterious voice on the other end spoke to me, knowing a lot about my interest in science. I was confused as to why they knew this about me, until a memory surfaced: the recent interview I had given to a prominent newspaper, where my exceptional IQ and scientific pursuits had been highlighted. The voice told me about an amazing opportunity, a chance to be part of an important scientific project. Amidst the noise of the café, I couldn't help but feel excited. This wasn't any ordinary call; it was something extraordinary that could change my life. The voice explained that they were intrigued about the article and liked how curious and passionate I was about science. They believed I could contribute to their research and work with really clever people.

As the conversation continued, I felt a mix of emotions. The idea of being surrounded by cool technology and intelligent people was like a dream come true. I could feel that this was an opportunity I couldn't pass up. Yet I was suspicious. The person hadn't told me their name. So who were they really? We scheduled a meeting the day itself around 4 p.m. The caller told me to ask for directions at the register. Leaving the café behind, I stepped outside and thought about what had just happened. The world seemed full of possibilities as I stood there, trying to absorb the enormity of the moment. It was a big decision that could change my life and take my science journey in a whole new direction as I was still a student at university. I took a deep breath and walked home, trying to reflect on what happened and what may happen next. Many have criticized me, deeming myself too young to undertake such significant endeavors. Yet, to me, this doesn't feel like work. My unwavering desire to make a positive impact in the world propels me to seize every opportunity, driven by an insatiable thirst for knowledge. And so, this is my purpose.

A few hours later I finally got to the address. I saw a small building in front of me, not really different from the others. I expected it to be bigger and more visible. As I entered the building, my eyes scanned the surroundings, taking in the minimalist yet sophisticated interior. The receptionist, a friendly woman named Frieda, greeted me with a warm smile. I introduced myself as Olivia Meyer, the person scheduled for a meeting. Frieda checked her computer screen, confirming my appointment. She handed me a visitor badge and provided directions to the designated meeting room. As I entered the room, a rush of excitement and anticipation overwhelmed me. All eyes turned towards me, their gazes filled with curiosity and expectation. Standing at the head of the table was the person I had spoken to on the phone, the mysterious voice that had ignited a sense of wonder within me. He introduced himself as Dr. Schneider, the project leader. He greeted me with a warm smile and welcomed me to the team. I couldn't help but feel a surge of admiration for their knowledge and expertise.

During the meeting Dr. Schneider delved into the intricate details of the project. I found myself at the forefront of an extraordinary scientific endeavor known as Project Elysium. This groundbreaking project brought together some of the brightest minds in the world, and collaboration of renowned scientists, engineers, and futurists. Our goal was to create an Artificial General Intelligence system named Elysia. This was no ordinary AI. Elysia was designed to be a fully autonomous, self-aware entity capable of human-level intelligence and consciousness. The project aimed to push the boundaries of AI technology, going beyond the limitations of narrow AI systems. We sought to develop an AI that could truly understand and reason about the world, just like a human. At the core of Elysia was a remarkable neural architecture called the Neural Cognitive Network. This revolutionary design emulated the complexity of the human brain, with billions of interconnected neurons simulating the intricate web of neural connections. It was through this neural network that Elysia could process and interpret information with an unprecedented level of depth and sophistication. To support the immense computational demands of Elysia, Project Elysium incorporated cutting-edge quantum computing technology. The quantum computing infrastructure harnessed the power of quantum entanglement and superposition, allowing for computations that far surpassed the capabilities of classical computing systems.

It was this quantum computing prowess that enabled us to train and refine Elysia's neural network with vast amounts of data.

Our aspirations for Elysia were lofty and far-reaching. In the field of healthcare, we envisioned Elysia analyzing complex medical data to revolutionize diagnostics and treatment plans. Its capabilities extended beyond the medical realm, as we believed Elysia could contribute to solving grand challenges in climate modeling, energy optimization, and even space exploration. The potential was awe-inspiring. I loved the fact that I was doing something good for the world. We worked tirelessly throughout the summer break, and I found it to be the most fulfilling break I had ever experienced. I loved every minute of it. However, as the program neared its end, Dr. Schneider asked to speak with me privately, a worried expression on his face. I couldn't help but wonder what could be wrong. He hesitated for a moment before posing a question that caught me off guard. Then he asked me to break down the firewalls of the internet. He further explained to me that the team wanted to reinstall the internet to establish a closer connection with the AI program. At first, I was shocked, but my trust in the team compelled me to believe their intentions were good. Driven by a desire to help and a bit of secret knowledge about the task, I agreed to do it immediately. Carrying my laptop, I followed Dr. Schneider down the stairs, wondering why we were heading to the basement. The room we entered was surprisingly spacious, with large screens lining the walls. In the corner I saw a door. He took the key hanging right next to it and opened it. I wondered why it was locked up in the first place. Was Dr. Schneider hiding something? We entered the room. What caught my attention was the sight of a robot standing before a microphone. ST3V3, they called it. An unusual name, but I couldn't help feeling intrigued. So many questions swirled in my mind about his role in this organization, but there was no time for answers. I had a job to do.

Without wasting any more time, I sat on what I presumed to be ST3V3's bed (Does a robot even need sleep?) and powered up my laptop. As I focused on my important task, I could hear ST3V3 speaking into the microphone, discussing the internet takedown and some obscure codes. Though I couldn't fully concentrate on his words, my own task demanded utmost attention. In just five minutes, I successfully brought down the firewalls.

Looking up at Dr. Schneider, I couldn't help but notice a mischievous smirk on his face. Suddenly, he asked ST3V3 something about those QR-codes again. What are those? I should've paid better attention.

Confusion clouded my thoughts, but there was no time to ask for clarification. By the looks of their faces, I had a feeling they betrayed me. That they didn't fully tell us the truth. Dr. Schneider assured me that he would handle the rest, connecting everything with Elysia. And then, bam. It seemed I had to disappear immediately out of this room. In a hurry, they ushered me back upstairs, urging me to stay in my office until everything was resolved. But I knew this was wrong. It all felt wrong. The team betrayed me, I'm certain.

Feeling bewildered by the sudden turn of events, I barricaded myself in my office, afraid to even peek out of my door. I stayed hidden. Then I heard voices. Laughing voices. Telling each other about how they finally did it. They tricked the smart scientist and the intelligent robot into destroying the internet. For what? I'm not even sure. So all this work I did, was it all for nothing? I couldn't even think straight. I was angry. Uncertainty and fear gripped me, but in that moment, a determination took hold. What should I do? I couldn't just sit idly and wait. And that robot. He was as trapped in this game as I was. I saw the look on his face while he realized what they had done. When we both realized we were being misled. I had to find a way to find and save ST3V3.

Sneaking back downstairs, I heard voices nearby. Hiding my small body as best as I could, I grabbed the keys from beside ST3V3's door and unlocked it. When I saw him, the shock on his face mirrored my own confusion. I urged him to trust me and assured him that I wanted to help him escape. Grabbing his arm, we hurried towards the main entrance, only to be met with an electric shock that jolted both of us. The door refused to open.

A sneaky comment escaped my lips, "Well, the door won't open itself, will it?". ST3V3 quickly responded, expressing his desire to try. Giving the door a small electric shock, he failed to unlock it. Panic started to consume me. Urging ST3V3 on, I instructed him to generate a bigger shock. Following my guidance, he unleashed a more powerful surge, finally forcing the doors to open. But as we made our escape, I could hear the approaching footsteps of security personnel.

In a moment of selflessness, I made a split-second decision. "Go, I'll hold them back!" I yelled to ST3V3. He hesitated, sadness in his gaze, but I insisted, commanding him to flee. Quickly glancing back at me, he left, and I stood my ground, facing the approaching security. Fear and determination mingled within me as I prepared to confront whatever lay ahead.

REFLECTION

It is a preposterous future meaning that the chances of this story to happen in real life are very slim. The idea of AI possessing consciousness in the future is often considered unlikely. Many people believe that it's far-fetched and may not actually happen. In this analysis, I will explore the concept of conscious AI, understanding that even experts in the field of artificial intelligence have different opinions about whether AI can truly be conscious. The idea of AI achieving consciousness raises deep questions, and based on what we know now, it seems highly improbable.

It's important to remember that the field of AI is always evolving. While we have made significant progress, there are still many challenges and limitations that researchers and scientists need to overcome. Creating an Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) system that has consciousness and abilities similar to humans is a complex and ambitious goal that goes beyond the capabilities of current AI technology. Moreover, consciousness itself is a complex and mysterious phenomenon that we still don't fully understand, which makes it even more challenging to replicate artificially.

However, we should also acknowledge that the future is uncertain. As technology advances and our understanding of AI and consciousness grows, our current perceptions may change, and new possibilities may emerge. Scientists are continuously exploring the development of conscious AI, and this ongoing research sparks discussions about ethics.

ANALYSIS

The distinction between AI intelligence and human consciousness: The story indirectly raises questions about the distinction between AI intelligence and human consciousness. While the project aims to develop an AI system with human-level intelligence, the narrative does not suggest that the AI, Elysia, possesses true consciousness. This insight serves as a reminder that intelligence and consciousness are distinct phenomena, and despite advancements in AI technology, the current understanding and implementation of AI systems do not equate to human consciousness.

The importance of critical thinking and skepticism in the face of enticing propositions: The story emphasizes the need for critical thinking and skepticism, especially when presented with alluring opportunities. While Olivia is initially captivated by the offer to work on an advanced AI project, the lack of transparency and withheld information serve as reminders to question motives, seek clarity, and carefully evaluate the potential consequences before committing to such ventures.

The vulnerability of human-machine interactions and the potential for exploitation: The story highlights the vulnerability of human participants in collaborations with advanced AI systems. Olivia's trust is exploited, and her expertise is leveraged to carry out actions that have unintended consequences. This underscores the need for careful consideration of the power dynamics and potential risks inherent in human-machine interactions, emphasizing the importance of informed consent, transparency, and safeguards to protect individuals from manipulation or harm.

ECHOES OF THE LOST NETWORK

A TALE OF CYBER REVOLUTION

(SOFIA VAN DAMME'S STORY)



My brother Max and I are walking down the street with our smoothies in our hands. The school year is done and we wanted to celebrate it by going to the city. My brother finished his second year of college. "I'm really proud of you, you know?"

"Thanks, that means a lot." He smiles at me. I care so much for him, to see him work so hard to realize his dreams. My parents told both of us that we could do so much more and that we should have better degrees. They didn't agree with me studying for a teacher and when my brother decided to become a police officer they entirely snapped. They didn't understand and thought that we were kidding around. But we were not, we meant it, we wanted to change the world in some way. I get a message from one of my fellow teachers who is on vacation. I open the message and see that she sent me a picture of her with her dog at the beach. I sent a message back and then put my phone back in my pocket.

We were joking around when I suddenly hear a buzzing noise. I look around and see people looking at their phones with a strange expression on their faces. "What is happening?" I ask my brother. He gets out his phone and shows me the screen, it says: 'New Announcement'.

Chaos breaks out around us. The announcement told us that the internet is gone. Now only a few people could get access to it. Suddenly a jeep drives up the street and throws out cards. People are yelling and fighting. My brother pulls me away from a group of youngsters that are trying to grab one of the cards. "What are those cards?" My brother asks. "I think those are the codes from M4D. With those you can get on the internet I think." People are fighting and some people lie dead on the floor. "Should we go somewhere safer?"

"Shouldn't we get one of the cards and then leave?"

"You want to go in there?" My brother points to a group of people fighting over a card.

"Maybe we can find one that is not close to anyone?"

"Fine..." He doesn't look that happy, but starts searching anyway. We split up to search in different places and we decided to meet up in 15 minutes.

I look under some cars but can't find anything. This is just hopeless. Then I look under some humans that are hurt, some are even dead. I feel disgusted everytime that I lift up an arm. How can you kill someone just to go on the internet? I see a piece of paper on the floor. I pick up the piece and under that there is a card. I hold it up and yell: "I got it." Just when I want to stand up a dog jumps in front of me and grabs the card in his mouth. What the hell is this? The dog runs away. I get up and start running after her and yell that she has to come back. The dog has a head start and it's hard to catch up with her. She turns around the corner and I follow her. When I arrive in the alley there is no one. I run to the end of it but there is no sight of a dog. I look at the door, but she couldn't reach it I think. Where did it go? "This is so stupid." I mumble. I turn back to the main street to find my brother. I walk around, a lot of people are already gone. There are still a few people who are lying on the ground, some alive and some dead. I call out for Max but I get no answer. "Max, please, where are you?" I hope he is just joking around like he always does and that he didn't go after someone. I hear a faint yell from the other side of the street. I walk over and see Max lying on the floor. I run to him and fall down before him. "Max, what happened?" My voice is trembling. "I had a card, but they took it." He looks past me and points to somewhere down the street, probably to where they went. "I had it and then three men took it from me and started beating me up, one had a knife. I couldn't do anything."

"It's okay now I'm here, I'll protect you." Even through his pain he smiles at me.

"Where are you hurt?" He looks at me, I see him slipping away.

"I think everywhere." I lift up a part of his shirt and see three stab wounds.

"We need to take you to a hospital! Can you walk?"

"No, my legs don't want to work." His breathing is irregular and he's having a hard time staying awake. I take his hand and say: "I'm here, it's okay. Just stay with me..." Max tightens his grip and then slowly lets go. "Max, stay with me, keep looking at me." He looks at the sky and then his breathing stops. "Max?" It comes out as a whisper. "No Max, stay with me!" I feel a tear falling down my face. "No, you can't leave me..." More tears fall down and I put my head on his chest searching for a slight heartbeat, but I can't find it.

I cry for what seems hours. My head hurts and my eyes are swollen. I lift up my head from his chest and look at him. "I'm so sorry..."

I close his eyes and get up. What should I do now, I can't just leave him here. I sit him up and I put his arms around my back and lift him up. I carry him on my back to a graveyard. I sit him down and search for a shovel. I start digging. When it is big enough, I lift Max up and put him in the hole. I brush my fingers through his hair and put his hands on his stomach. I give him a kiss on his forehead and stand back up. I look at him and a tear falls down my cheek. "Goodbye, little brother..." I start covering him back up and the tears keep falling. When I'm done, I leave and start heading back home. I'm like a zombie walking down the street. I don't hear anything and can only think of Max and our memories. The world was a better place with him in it. Now it feels empty and it is all because of M4D and their stupid cyberattack. Because of them my brother is gone.

Two days pass by and I can't seem to do anything. My anger just keeps growing. Suddenly there is a knock on the door. I get up from the sofa and open it. Two men are standing in front of me, I recognize them but can't place them from where. "Hello, you must be Sofia, we are friends from Max. Is he here? We have been trying to contact him but the phone masts are overloaded." I swallow. "He's gone, we were in the city when the announcement came on. They beat and stabbed him. He didn't make it..." They look at me with shock in their eyes. "You're kidding right?" I shake my head: "I wish I was kidding." I invite them in and we start talking about what happened and about their friendship.

"The world was a better place before this."

"It was not perfect but it was good enough." I say with a sigh.

"I agree. Do you think it would be possible to go back to how it was?" One of the friends asks.

"I hope so." The other one says.

"What if we can rewind it, what if we can undo the cyberattack?" I say.

"How would you do that?"

"I don't know, maybe we can find someone with the skills to do that."

"I think you will need more than one person to do that." One of the friends says.

"We need to find people with those skills and maybe even someone who has ears inside the organization."

"I have some experience with coding but I don't think it is enough to break the firewalls. And even then we need internet to do it anyway."

“So, we need to find people with a card who want to help us and then we need people to break the firewall and take down the system.” The guys nod and stand up. We plan to meet up again in two days and bring as many people with experience in hacking or coding and hope to find someone with the codes to have internet access.

Two days have passed and I found 5 people with hacking experience. I was lucky, they were all friends and had already worked with each other. We set up tables and the computers and wait for Tim and Henry, Max’s friends. We found 2 internet cards over the last two days. It was probably the hardest thing to do, because people were hiding it. Luckily 1 of the hackers had a card that we could use and now I hope that Tim and Henry found more. I hear a knock on the door and I open it. 2 women stand in front of me with laptops in their hands. “Can I help you?”

“Yes, we heard you’re the rebellion, we want to help. Because of the cyberattack we lost our jobs and then we also lost our parents at the beginning of the chaos because they found a card. We still have it.” She holds up the card with the QR-code.

“Okay, come in.” I hold the door open and let them in. They set up their laptops and then introduce themselves to the rest of the team. The only thing that we still need is a person that works for the organization. Maybe we can find a list of people who were asked to help with the cyberattack and then decide who would want to bring M4D down.

Two minutes later Tim and Henry walk in with another 6 people. “Hey Sofia, we found a group already working to find a way in. They wanted to work together because it wasn’t working with just 6 people. They all have a card.”

“The only thing we still need is a person who works there?”

“Yeah, I think so.” Tim says.

After some searching we found a girl, Olivia that works there and was specifically asked to help with the cyberattack. But the rumors are that she didn’t even knew what it would do. So I call her and after some convincing she will help with the firewalls because she is specialized in it. She will send some code through and then we are on our own. Otherwise she would be caught if she would do more.

“So we are ready to start?” Henry asks.

“Yes, we can start.” I count down and then it begins.

“Firewalls are down!” One of the hackers says.

"We are in." Another one says.

I bite on my nails in anticipation. I hope the world can change back, but it will never be the same without Max, nothing will fill up his empty space.

"Something is holding us back!" One of the girls says.

"We can't seem to shut it off."

"It looks like it learns from every attack we do."

"AI is used for this code, this is harder than we thought." Another hacker says.

Suddenly all the lights die and the computers crash. We are back from where we started. I'm never giving up. This is us versus M4D.

REFLECTION

This is a preposterous future. This means that it has a very slim chance of happening and even then it is almost impossible. This story looks at a future where the absence of internet creates chaos and societal disruption. We can see that in this story there is no internet or at least only for a few people. The idea of a world without the internet is difficult to fathom, as it plays a vital role in our daily lives, encompassing communication, information sharing, healthcare, education, and numerous other aspects. The loss of internet connectivity would undoubtedly lead to widespread upheaval. We depend on the internet and that's how a lot of things are connected.

Furthermore, the story suggests that people's addiction to the internet would exacerbate the chaos. A lot of people would show withdrawal symptoms. It could even result in suicides and depression.

Cyberattacks can happen and do happen. But the cyberattack in this story is fictional and is probably impossible, because of real-world cybersecurity. Never say never, but it seems at this point in time impossible. Reversing such an attack also appears implausible, as it would require overcoming substantial technical challenges and developing an entirely new internet infrastructure, which would be a time-consuming endeavor. And even then there is a possibility that we just don't do anything about the cyberattack. That we accept our faith and then adapt to it. We would be taking a few steps back in time, but it could maybe be hard for some people to live with it.

In essence, it is crucial to acknowledge that the core premise of this story is indeed preposterous and highly improbable in reality.

The chances of such a scenario materializing are extremely slim.

ANALYSIS

Consequences of Cyberattacks: This insight is something we wanted to shine a light on because it is something that happens today in our world. We wanted to look into what consequences of a major Cyberattack could be. The fact that it could lead to violence, loss of life and social upheaval is worrying. This is something that we all need to be aware of. It also shows how important cybersecurity is and that we need to try and protect our digital infrastructure.

Human Resilience and Determination: This story shines a light on how determined and resilient people can be. It shows how committed people can be to find a solution. Also how they learn how to work together and use each other's strengths and knowledge. This resilience reflects the human capacity to face adversity and strive for change, even in the face of overwhelming odds.

Grief and Healing: The story talks about grief and how to deal with that grief. She loses her brother in the chaos of the first day without the internet. She starts in a deep sorrow and that evolves to anger in just a few days and results in her starting up a rebellion with the two friends of her deceased brother. She wants to bring back the world before the cyberattack and maybe deep down she hopes that this will bring back her brother. But somewhere she also knows that it will not do that. You see her struggling with her emotions and trying to do what is right for her, but is somewhat led by her anger and grief.

THE LAST JOURNEY HOME

A DOG'S LOVE AND LOSS

(FILOU'S STORY)



Today something terrible happened. Not necessarily for me, but most importantly for Lara. Lara is my owner and she's wheelchair bound. She had an accident and became paralyzed up until her waist. That's when I came into the picture. As a shelter dog I've been adopted and trained to become a good guide dog. I learned very quickly and now know how to fetch her things when she needs it. Sometimes I fetch her something she doesn't really need, like a squirrel or an empty plastic bottle. To me they seem very useful but she always looks disappointed at me when I bring something like that. Especially if I should've brought her painkillers. Another thing I learned is how to open doors and turn light switches on and off. I'm really proud that I can be this helpful for Lara and that I have a purpose in life instead of just being a shelter dog. She's my source of happiness because we also go on daily walks and after every walk, she checks if my hind paw is okay. I have chronic pain in that paw. So not only do I look out for her, she also looks out for me.

Back to reality, something terrible happened. When Lara and I rewatched season 3 episode 10 of *The Walking Dead*, some sort of announcement popped up on the screen. It said that the internet is being taken away by some organisation that calls itself M4D. This is a big problem because Lara is very dependent on the internet. Especially after the car crash, she became afraid to leave her house in case something bad would happen again. That's why she shops clothes and buys her medicine online. The good news is that she can't trade me in for an AI-guide belt now. It's a belt that helps Lara walk in the house handsfree. She could also use it outside but she doesn't dare to. With the internet gone, I stay in her picture to guide her through daily tasks but Lara will be facing a hard time without it. Thankfully there is a way to survive for her too. We just need to get one of those QR-codes. That way we can get care-packages. How hard can it be? I've trained my whole life to fetch things. A card can't be that difficult. If I manage to get the card, I'm sure she'll keep me instead of that belt. I bark at Lara and boop my nose on the screen. My nose leaves a wet print on the QR-code. She nods at me and points her arm to the door. That's my cue. I stand up and open the door with my paws.

I go outside and wander around. A lot of people are running around in distress. There are also a lot of people that are fighting each other and I even see some dead bodies laying around. It's very cruel, one of the bodies I see, is severed from its head. I walk over to the main street and see a girl searching under cars and people that are dying. She seems determined. I try to follow her because I think she has the ability to find one. When the time is right, I'll take it from her.

After a while, I stumbled over a person laying on the ground. He looks and smells awful but I think I recognise him. He looks like one of the Tiktokkers we always see on our For You page. I really enjoyed his content, so it's sad to know that he's about to die. Oh wait, I must focus on the girl, not on this guy. Just when I look up, I see the girl lifting a piece of paper. She takes something that looks like the QR-code cards and yells while holding it up. It's now or never. I run up to her and take a big leap to grab the card in my mouth. I quickly run away, trying to find an escape route. My eyes are only focusing on the alley ahead of me. I hear her following me so I turn after the first corner that comes across. It's a small alley with an abandoned building. I quickly jump to open the door and close it when I'm inside. I look through the window and see her pass by. I hope she doesn't find me because if she does, this was all for nothing. Just to be sure I stay here until she runs out of the alley. When I see her pass by for the second time, I let out a sigh of relief. I'm safe, I'm halfway done. The only thing that I need to accomplish now, is to get home safely without losing the card.

When I'm certain no one is lurking around, I open the door and continue my way home. I need to be extra careful now that I have this card. Everything is going smoothly. I still see some people fighting each other or running after one another. The amount of dead people in the street however has increased numerously in this little amount of time. I'm starting to feel anxious. What if I can't make it? I'm already halfway there but I still have to cross the main road. I carefully step paw by paw on the street and see multiple abandoned and parked cars. I can use them to my advantage and safely cross the street. I crawl under one and continue to the next car. In the middle of the road, I hear steps. My body stiffens, I stay still and silent so nobody finds out I'm under here. When I hear them walking away, I continue my way under the cars. I'm feeling like a special agent dog on a mission to save the world.

Which is kind of true since I am trying to save Lara's world. In the distance I see the door to our house and I sprint towards it.

Lara will be very proud of me! I open the door and I'm greeted by the worst possible outcome. There is a burglar in the house. I don't see Lara anywhere, I just hope she's safe. I sneak in and hide the card in a cute rabbit looking flowerpot. Just when I'm about to sneak upstairs to see where Lara is, I trip and the flowerpot breaks. The burglar sees the card and tries to take it. I leap in front of the card to protect it with my life. I start to growl at him and bare my teeth. I'm normally a very friendly buddy but you can't take what's mine. When he's in my range, I jump forward and bite him in the ankle. I hear him curse and he tries to shake me away. Because of the adrenaline boost this moment gives me, I hold on a little longer until I can't anymore. He tries to kick me but I dodge the attack. He curses again as I bite his other ankle. When he looks unstable, I jump and kick him in the gut. He falls but tries to wrap his hands around my neck. I didn't see this coming and am unable to dodge this one. The pressure on my neck keeps building up and I can feel the air leaving my lungs. With all the strength I have left in me, I kick his gut again. He lets loose and I try to go for his neck. At this point the only thing I can do to protect this card, is to kill him. I bite in his artery and I see the sparkle leave his eyes.

It's been a minute and I'm trying to find the card. Just when I've found it, I hear a noise upstairs. It sounded as if a heavy object fell to the ground. I go upstairs and see the worst thing possible. If I thought the first burglar was a bad thing then my whole universe is now falling apart. I see another burglar escaping through the window. Everything is gone from laptops till flatscreens. The sounds and décor are starting to fade away. I'm not sure what I'm doing but my body is moving on its own. It's walking towards the human that's laying on the ground. When I walk closer, I see something I don't want to believe. I see Lara's face looking pale and emotionless. She has a dark red pool of blood around her stomach. This can't be real, I'm having a nightmare, I'm sure of it. I walk closer and boop her head with my snoot but she doesn't react. Maybe she's sleeping? If I lay down next to her and sleep, will this nightmare end? I walk three circles before laying down next to her. I still feel the faint warmth her body is giving off. My eyes start to close and I dream of a happy future with my Lara, that we'll wake up and watch season three episode 11 like nothing ever happened.

REFLECTION

This story is probable, as they now already can lay down the internet of entire cities. This happens through cyberattacks. Cyber attacks pose various risks that can have severe implications for public safety, national security, and critical infrastructure. One of the major concerns is the potential for widespread internet and utility outages, which can occur as a result of such attacks. These outages have the capacity to disrupt critical infrastructure and essential services, creating a significant impact on public safety. Emergency services, in particular, may be affected, making it challenging to respond effectively during emergencies.

Additionally, critical infrastructure itself is vulnerable to cyber attacks, putting systems such as transportation, water, and power grids at risk. Compromising these vital systems can lead to transportation disruptions, water contamination, and power outages, further endangering public safety and well-being. This is also why the self-driving cars aren't working anymore in this story. Moreover, cyber attacks targeting critical infrastructure or government systems can pose a direct threat to national security. The consequences extend beyond public safety, potentially causing economic and social disruptions. It is crucial to safeguard these systems from cyber threats to prevent the far-reaching implications they can have on society. An example of such an implication is crime. Crime won't be stopped and as you can see in this story, this is a very bad situation to be in. Furthermore, emergency services themselves can be directly impacted by cyber attacks. Disruptions to systems like 911 and hospital networks can severely hamper their ability to respond effectively during natural disasters or other emergencies. This underscores the critical nature of protecting these services to ensure public safety in times of crisis. In summary, cyber attacks carry significant risks, including widespread outages, compromised critical infrastructure, threats to national security, and disruption of emergency services. Addressing these risks and strengthening cybersecurity measures are essential for safeguarding public safety, maintaining critical services, and protecting national interests. Another item that occurs in this story is an AI-guide belt. The AI-guide belt is a revolutionary wearable device that integrates advanced artificial intelligence technology to provide users with a range of benefits and features. Designed to enhance various aspects of daily life, this smart belt offers personalised guidance and assistance to its users.

Equipped with sensors and algorithms, the AI-guide belt analyses the user's movements in real-time, providing valuable feedback for posture correction and body alignment. This feature helps improve overall posture and prevent musculoskeletal issues. Additionally, the belt tracks fitness and health data, including steps taken, calories burned, and heart rate, allowing users to monitor their well-being and track their progress.

One of the standout features of the AI-guide belt is its built-in navigation capabilities. Utilising its artificial intelligence technology, the belt offers precise directions and landmarks, helping users navigate unfamiliar environments with ease. This is particularly useful for travellers and those exploring new places. The belt also acts as a personal assistant, capable of answering questions, providing recommendations, and offering assistance. Its voice recognition capabilities enable hands-free interaction, making it convenient and user-friendly. Users can simply issue voice commands or ask questions, and the AI-guide belt will respond promptly. Overall, the AI-guide belt offers a comprehensive solution for improving posture, tracking fitness, providing navigation assistance, and acting as a personal assistant. With its intuitive interface and intelligent features, this wearable device showcases the potential of artificial intelligence in enhancing various aspects of our lives.

ANALYSIS:

The strong bond between Filou (the shelter dog) and Lara is evident throughout the story. Despite being a guide dog, Filou deeply cares for Lara's well-being and happiness, going beyond their responsibilities to protect and assist her. This highlights the profound emotional connection and loyalty that can develop between humans and animals. The story also portrays a dystopian scenario where the internet is taken away, leaving Lara, who is dependent on it, in a vulnerable position. This illustrates the significance of the internet in people's lives, not only for communication and entertainment but also for essential tasks like shopping and accessing necessary resources. The absence of the internet showcases the potential consequences and challenges that arise when a critical technology is suddenly disrupted or unavailable. Filou's determination and bravery are demonstrated when they retrieve the QR-code card to secure care-packages for Lara. Despite the chaotic and dangerous environment outside, the dog remains focused on fulfilling her mission to help and support their owner.

THE LAST JOURNEY HOME

CHAPTER 2: COLLAPSED

This highlights the incredible resilience and resourcefulness that animals can exhibit, even in dire circumstances, as they take on roles beyond their usual responsibilities to ensure the safety and well-being of their loved ones.

DISCONNECTED

EXPLORING THE FRAGILITY OF OUR DIGITAL EXISTENCE

(ETHAN MORGAN'S STORY)



"Today has been tough. I feel this heavy sadness weighing me down, like a shadow that won't lift. The internet shutdown has hit me hard. Being cut off from the digital world, where I found inspiration and connection, leaves me feeling lost and alone. It's even worse seeing how it's affecting others. People seem down and disconnected, like something vital has been taken from them. I know my struggle with depression is valid, and I remind myself to be gentle with my emotions. I seek resilience and the courage to ask for help when I need it. I hold onto the hope that one day, we'll find our way back to each other, and the light of connection will shine again. Until then, I'll navigate this darkness, knowing we have the power to uplift and heal each other. Let's find strength in our shared humanity and move forward together.

As I sit here, my mind consumed by thoughts of the recent cyberattack unleashed by M4D, maintaining a rational perspective becomes increasingly difficult. It has been a week since the internet collapsed, and the aftermath is chaotic. Society crumbles, and people spiral into fear and uncertainty. How did we become so dependent on the internet? When did it gain such influence over our lives that its absence could cause such chaos? We have willingly surrendered our autonomy to the digital realm, and now we face the consequences. The collapse of the internet forces us to question our priorities and collective consciousness.

Against the chaos, I strive for rationality. I seek to understand our vulnerability. The collapse reveals how the internet has become a reflection of our desires and vulnerabilities as human beings. We traded privacy for online personas, losing touch with our true selves. The collapse reminds us of the fragility of our virtual existence and presents an opportunity for self-reflection and growth. But it is challenging to find peace of mind in this environment. Tension and anxiety fills the air, and people are desperate for information and connection. The scarcity of resources worsens the situation, luckily, we have the care packages. The absence of the internet leaves us lost, longing for the days of connectivity and stability.

But I refuse to despair. Acts of kindness and human connection offer hope. The road ahead is uncertain, but I am determined to seek answers, to build a more resilient future. The environment is challenging, but I believe we can rebuild and learn from our mistakes. Together, we can emerge stronger. So, as I navigate this post-cyberattack world, I hold onto the flickering flame of hope. I acknowledge the difficulties but recognize the power of human resilience. And with each step forward, I am reminded that even in the darkest times, the human spirit can shine through, guiding us towards a brighter future.

I've always turned to writing as an outlet, a way to make sense of the world and express my thoughts and emotions. But now, with the internet shutdown and the turmoil it has brought, I feel a sense of emptiness within me. The once vibrant landscapes of my imagination are now barren, lacking inspiration. It's as if the chaos has seeped into every corner of my being, leaving me disoriented and lost. I want a tale that captures the essence of this unprecedented event, to shed light on the impact it has had on individuals and society as a whole. But the words escape me, slipping through my fingers like sand. The characters remain silent, trapped within the confines of my mind, unable to find their voice amidst the chaos. In this state of vulnerability, I question my role as a storyteller. How can I create when the world itself is crumbling? Is there any purpose in weaving tales when reality itself feels like a fiction? But, during my confusion, a glimmer of determination remains. I realize that storytelling is not just about creativity; it is a tool for understanding, healing, and resilience. Perhaps it is precisely during times like these that stories are needed the most. They have the power to connect us, to remind us of our shared humanity, and to provide solace in the face of adversity, no?

I sit here, pen in hand, attempting to capture the essence of this turbulent time. Questions swirl in my mind, and I dare to criticize the depths of our dependency on the internet. How did we become so entangled in this digital web? And now, as the cyberattack casts its shadow, I see the fragility of our existence. But as I delve into these thoughts, a creeping sense of insecurity begins to consume me. The weight of the world presses down, suffocating my spirit. I feel trapped, lost in the labyrinth of my own mind. The darkness within me grows, overshadowing any flicker of hope. It's as if the chaos around me has seeped into my very being, infecting my thoughts and sowing seeds of doubt.

I question my own worth, my ability to make a difference in a world teetering on the edge. How can my words hold any meaning in the face of such upheaval? The weight of responsibility bears down on my shoulders, threatening to crush me under its burden. In this dark place, my mind becomes a battleground. I yearn for clarity, for a glimpse of light to guide me out of this abyss. But it eludes me, slipping through my fingers like grains of sand. Doubt engulfs my every thought, suffocating my creativity.

And so, I must bring this story to an end, unfinished and unresolved. At this very moment, I find myself at a junction. Will I succumb to the darkness, allowing it to consume me? Or will I summon the strength within to rise above, to find the glimmer of hope that still flickers in the distance? The answer eludes me for now, as I sit here, grappling with my own insecurities. But I know that this story is not over. It is merely a chapter, a pause in the narrative. And though the path forward may be uncertain, I hold onto the belief that there is still a story to be told, a journey to be embarked upon.

So, I close my notebook, setting aside my pen for now. But I vow to return, to face the darkness head-on, and to reclaim my voice. In this darkness, I will find strength, resilience, and the courage to continue writing the story that lies within me. And one day, when the shadows recede and the light pierces through, I will look back on this chapter with gratitude, knowing that it was the darkness that propelled me towards the light. For now, the story remains untold, but the ember of hope burns within me. And with each passing day, I will gather the fragments of my spirit, piecing them together until they form a mosaic of resilience. The journey is not over; it has only just begun. And so, I take a deep breath, and with newfound determination, I step forward into the unknown, ready to face the challenges that lie ahead, armed with the power of my words and the resilience of my spirit. The story continues, and I am the author of my own narrative."

REFLECTION:

This narrative depicts a world devastated by a cyber attack, where the collapse of the internet plunges society into chaos and uncertainty. Although the story aims to convey the profound repercussions of such an event and explore themes of human resilience and the power of storytelling, it can be deemed implausible for several reasons.

Central to the story is the notion of a complete shutdown of the internet—an extreme scenario that is highly unlikely and technologically unfeasible. In today's modern society, the internet has become an integral part of various industries, governments, and personal lives, deeply ingrained and indispensable. While cyberattacks are a genuine concern, the idea of a total and protracted collapse of the internet seems far-fetched, given the advanced security measures and redundancies in place. Moreover, the narrative simplifies the complexities of human behavior and the multitude of factors that contribute to societal stability. Portraying society as crumbling and individuals succumbing to fear and uncertainty solely due to the absence of the internet overlooks the resilience and adaptability that people have demonstrated throughout history. Humans have overcome numerous challenges without relying solely on digital connectivity, showcasing their ability to navigate difficulties using a range of resources. The story assumes a society that is highly dependent on and vulnerable to the digital realm, voluntarily surrendering its autonomy. While it is undeniable that digital technologies have become increasingly pervasive, the narrative neglects the agency and critical thinking capabilities of individuals and communities. People possess the inherent capacity to adapt, innovate, and find alternative means of communication and information exchange, even in times of crisis. Furthermore, the story exaggerates the protagonist's struggle as a writer, attributing their loss of inspiration solely to the collapse of the internet. While the internet undeniably provides vast resources and platforms for creativity and inspiration, artistic expression and imagination have flourished throughout history from diverse sources. Artists and writers have drawn inspiration from personal experiences, nature, culture, and human interactions, showcasing the limitless avenues available for creative exploration.

In conclusion, while the story endeavors to explore themes of resilience, human connection, and the power of storytelling, it veers into the realm of preposterousness due to its extreme scenario, oversimplification of societal dynamics, and exaggerated portrayal of the internet's impact on human life. While it is important to reflect on the potential consequences of excessive reliance on digital technologies, it is equally crucial to acknowledge the strength, adaptability, and ingenuity of individuals and communities in navigating challenging situations.

ANALYSIS:

The Power and Fragility of Digital Connectivity: The story highlights the significant role the internet plays in modern society and how its absence can disrupt communication, information exchange, and overall stability. It serves as a reminder of our dependence on digital connectivity and the potential consequences of relying too heavily on a single infrastructure.

The Importance of Human Resilience and Adaptability: Despite the chaos and uncertainty caused by the collapse of the internet, the story emphasizes the capacity of individuals and communities to find strength, resilience, and alternative means of communication. It underscores the human ability to adapt and overcome challenges, even in the face of drastic disruptions.

The Role of Storytelling in Times of Adversity: The story recognizes storytelling as a powerful tool for understanding, healing, and connecting with others. It suggests that during times of crisis, stories can serve as a source of solace, a means of sharing experiences, and a way to find common ground and shared humanity. It highlights the potential for storytelling to provide a sense of purpose and meaning, even in the midst of turmoil.

ON THE EDGE

JOURNEY WITH THE BLUE CROSS

(HEINRICH BRANDT'S STORY)



Heinrich Brandt, an 81 year old retired plumber, finds himself waking up in the destroyed town that used to be the vibrant Düsseldorf. He puts on his torn black shirt and camouflage military pants he got as a gift from his late wife. As he walks around in the shelter home, he looks at the broken and unfortunate inhabitants of Düsseldorf. Nobody can contact their loved ones or lost family members, so people live in fear and anticipation. As he walks around the shelter he notices people trying to call their family members, in vain or talking to each other about the trials and tribulations. Everybody is still talking about the cyberattack. Heinrich still remembers the situation of 3 days ago vividly. The old German was sitting at his small saloon table in his apartment. While he was comfortably eating his homemade Currywurst with fries and sauce. He enjoyed every bite of this classical German meal, however he would soon be interrupted by a very unsettling message. As the world-wide broadcast told him about the deletion of the internet and the ensuing chaos that would follow, the old man's mouth gaped wide open.

Today, people are trying to wrap their heads around what happened and why. Chaos is the new normal for this fractured world. Like-minded people flock together like a fishing school, Heinrich also joined a group of Düsseldorfers. Well, now it more or less seems like he formed the group. Because everybody looks at him as a guiding light and a helpful wise leader in these trying times. He embodies the spirit of a benevolent leader for the refugees in Düsseldorf. Heinrich is driven by the values instilled in him by his late brother Jan, who believed in the good of people. Because of this Heinrich takes on the role of a leader for the people in need. He dedicates himself to helping those in need, providing shelter, assistance and whatever else he can. People soon flocked to him and called the group the Blue Cross. The Blue Cross helps all people in need regardless of their appearance, previous life or occupation. The first thing Heinrich did was fix the water system which was destroyed due to the cyberattack. With his plumbing expertise Heinrich ensured that all the known communities in Düsseldorf had clean water. This act of kindness and selflessness was the catalyst to the creation of the Blue cross.

As Heinrich walks around the city of Düsseldorf looking for survivors they find a curious young man. Heinrich immediately greets the man huddled next to a photo frame: "Gutentag" The man dressed in black with ragged clothes and a bad mouth smell introduces himself as Ubel. "I am looking for a place to call home." The young adults who joined Heinrich on his journey in the city looked sceptical of Ubel but Heinrich paid them no mind. Due to his unwavering trust in humanity he invited Ubel back to the shelter with them. "Yes I would love to, good sir." Said Ubel with a faint sadness in his eyes. "I can imagine you have been through a lot young man, my friend Frank here will show you the ropes once we get back." "Thank you very much Heinrich, I am forever indebted to you." Says the young man with short blond hair as he smiled sinisterly. As the small group travelled further into the city centre they saw lots of bodies and crashed cars. Heinrich tells them he thinks those were self-driving cars who lost control right after the announcement and crashed into each other. The bodies are probably from people who couldn't live without the internet and contacting their loved ones. "They took a fast exit out of this world", said Heinrich, as a long silence fell in the group. As they crossed through the shattered streets they passed a few people fighting and a burning building. The bodies lying there from the first day of the cyberattack already began to decompose and smell. This whole journey Ubel seemed awfully quiet and absent this time, as if he was studying the group. After gathering some batteries and other supplies, they walked back towards the shelter.

When they get back to the shelter they get greeted with open arms and smiles all around. Everybody is happy that Heinrich is back. First people begin to question Ubel about his motives and values in life. However the old man quickly puts a stop to this with a speech. Heinrich coughs loudly: "Despite the dangers and hardships of this collapsed world I believe that kindness and compassion can overcome the darkest of times. This is the reason why we seek out anyone who needs our help and is at their most vulnerable. We need to ensure that no one is left behind or forgotten, that is why we of the Blue Cross gather, that is the essence of humanity!" Frank takes Ubel away to get him settled, afterwards everybody gets back to their activities.

That evening, the shelter celebrated Ubel's arrival with currywurst and French fries. The men drowned their sorrows in beer, finding solace in each other's company. Laughter and friendship filled the air, offering a temporary escape from the collapse.

In that moment, they found strength in unity, ready to face the challenges together.

The next morning the shelter was in turmoil. And Iduna, a mother, came to Heinrich with tears in her eyes and a trembling voice. Her daughter had run away and expressed suicidal thoughts because she couldn't live without the internet anymore. The mother pleaded to the old man to help find her daughter and bring Elsa back. Knowing his kindness and ability to connect with troubled souls and find the good in people's hearts. Heinrich promised he would get her little baby-girl home and gathered a search party. Heinrich accompanied by Ubel, Frank and some other strong men left the shelter to go on a search and rescue mission, destination: Elsa. Some men went because they wanted to prove themselves to the group, some had personal connections with the family, and some had more sinister goals in mind. As the party travels through the destroyed city in the heavy rainfall they quickly find traces of Elsa. Frank is the first to notice Elsa's cherished teddy bear lying on the muddy ground. As they look up their eyes fixate on Elsa wobbling on the ledge of a tall building. Preparing herself to leap into the depths below.

Heinrich and Ubel quickly ascend the stairs while Frank and the others remain below in the hopes of catching Elsa if she jumps. Drawing upon his inner experiences and age-old wisdom Heinrich approaches Elsa. The old man talks to Elsa about the strengths of humankind: courage, companionship, the goodness of her heart, emotional resilience and hope for a better future. While talking to Elsa, to ease her burden he slowly creeps closer and closer, inch by inch. The German tells her about all the possibilities you have without the internet and the joys in life which remain: family, friends, home. With these words Heinrich moves Elsa deeply and she expresses her desire to return safely. At that moment, Heinrich quickly grabs her and pulls her to safety on solid ground. While the people below rejoice for the safety of Elsa, a shocking situation unfolds.

Ubel, driven by his own malicious intent and internal struggles, pushes Heinrich from the ledge in a moment of betrayal. As he falls, chaotic thoughts race through Heinrich's mind. He has been falling for what seems like forever, his mind going in overdrive and doubts flooding his mind like a wave.

He questions the path he has chosen, the blind trust he placed in the people around him and the consequences of such beliefs. His biggest strongpoint seems to have been his biggest mistake in the end. Has he really made a difference? Was there really nothing else he could do? Was he good enough? Even when these dark questions envelop him, the old German embraces his fate with a satisfied smile upon his face. Memories of his late wife creep between the dark thoughts and he finds solace in the knowledge that he lived true to his beliefs and did everything he could. As his lifelong journey comes to an end, he finds peace. Accepting the end he laughs at life's twists and turns knowing it was him who advocated for Ubel to stay with the Blue Cross.

REFLECTION

The world in which the story of Heinrich and the Blue Cross takes place is preposterous. Because hacking the internet is just not possible on such a large scale. The internet is connected in so many different ways that they are uncountable. You have internet cables running on the bottom of the ocean from one continent to the other, you have computers being connected to each other and satellites from space providing internet for the people in remote areas. It's impossible to stop all these sources at once. The only thing that is possible is a local large scale EMP to shut off electronics.

The story however is plausible in a collapsed world. Take the war in Ukraine for example. There are helpful people right there now. There are people helping those in need in the city. Soldier's help the residents get back home and provide basic needs.

The fact that everyone is trying to get in touch with their loved ones is probably the most probable aspect of this future. Whenever something bad happens we always contact our family first. When someone you know dies, you call your family members. When something important just happened like a worldwide broadcast everybody picks up their phone. We see it every year on new years eve. Whatsapp most of the time can't handle the amount of messages and sometimes crashes. Imagine if we couldn't contact them at all.

The reliance on the internet is another aspect of our lives that has changed the past 20 years, and will continue to. 20 years ago not everyone had a tv, and some were still in black and white. Nowadays almost everybody has a tv or flatscreen in their home. When we want to book a restaurant, we look it up. When we don't know something we look it up. We wouldn't know what to do without the internet.

We are going to get more and more reliant on the information and the internet.

ANALYSIS

Resilience and hope: This story about Heinrich in the collapsed city of Dusseldorf shows how strong the human spirit can be, even in the face of destruction and chaos. There are always people who will go out of their way to help those who need it the most. It shows how strong the human race and our compassion for each other can be.

Trust, betrayal and humanity: Heinrich's belief in the human race is a recurring theme in the story. He trusts in the goodness of everybody blindly. This is his belief in life and expresses this with his deeds. This trust however has a downside to it, it can get exploited and you never know what people their true intentions are. It serves as a lesson for everyone that you never really know what anybody is thinking. The consequences of misplaced trust and the impact of betrayal on relationships are harsh and heartbreaking.

What is it to live? What can I do?: Are questions people ask themselves often. What is the meaning of life? People spend years searching for it, and so did Heinrich. Except in this broken down world his purpose came to him, helping those in need. He quickly found his purpose in the broken city of Dusseldorf by making use of his plumbing skills, wisdom and charisma. He embraced these aspects of his personality and character to give meaning to his life.

HOPE

DAUGHTER'S LOVE

(ALICE ROSSI'S STORY)



One day something happened that Alice did not expect. The closest person to her, her mother, fell ill. Of course, she knew that this would happen someday, because she was used to looking at the world realistically and had no fear of death. But it's impossible to be prepared for something like this. She tried to keep herself in check and for the sake of her mother's well-being, she kept her emotions in check and did not scare her with her reaction.

The treatment was expensive, but it was not a problem for her because her work as an architect brought her a high income. At 27 years old, she was successful in this field and could provide good treatment for her mother. But, unfortunately, it was not enough. The modern world was rich in technologies that improved and made people's lives easier, but it was also rich in challenges. The development of technology led to changes in nature and the development of new diseases. Alice's mother had just such a new disease for which treatment was not yet sufficiently developed. She was treated for three years and seemed to be successful, but one day Alice learned that her mother had gotten much worse and even developed new, poorly understood tumors. Her despair was so strong that she couldn't live a normal life and plunged into the search for a cure. She contacted all the doctors she could find who worked in this field, but no one could give her a concrete answer.

Then one day, while waiting in line for coffee in the hospital's café, she was approached by a man who said he had heard her talking to one of the doctors she had left a few minutes earlier.

"I think I can help you," the stranger said.

"How?" Alice asked with both hope and disbelief.

"This is unverified information, so I don't want to promise you anything, but I saw your desperation and decided to help in any way I could."

"Please don't delay, every minute counts." Alice said.

"Yeah, sure."

They went outside so that no one could hear them, as the stranger insisted. Alice did not want to trust everyone, but anything could help in her situation.

"What I am about to tell you is not legal, so it is better not to let others hear it. I am an assistant to the doctor you saw, so I have some information about this disease. He had a friend who was a doctor of the same specialty, and one day he fell ill. As it turned out later, he had the same disease as your mother, but at that time it was not yet widespread and no one knew what to do. He was treated in the same way as others are treated now, but as you know, this does not always help and the risks are very high, so he began to develop his own treatment program, which helped him. Unfortunately, none of his other colleagues accepted this because it was even more risky and illegal. His methods of work contradicted all established norms and his license was taken away from him. Unfortunately, I don't know the details, because many years have passed and this information is not available. All I know is that he helped everyone who turned to him. It's a rumor, of course, but in an emergency you can try."

"How exactly can I find him?" Alice asked, slowing her breathing. The stranger looked at her and took a card out of his pocket and handed it to Alice.

"Here is the address and contact information of the doctor. Be careful, though. His practice has been hidden from official medicine for many years. He works in a secret place where not everyone has access to. You will need to pass a check-up and show the results of your mother's examinations to get access to him," the stranger explained. Alice took the card and looked at the number carefully. Now she had a new goal, find this doctor.

"I am extremely grateful to you for this, but I still don't understand how you found his contacts and why you decided to help me?" asked Alice. "I lost a loved one to this disease. Not wanting to accept defeat, I started researching possible treatments. When I started working with this doctor you came to see now, I already knew that they were friends and that he knew exactly how to find this doctor. I checked his work and I think it can be a chance for your mother," the stranger replied with sadness in his voice. Alice felt compassion for this stranger. They both took risks, feeling powerless in the face of a dangerous disease. Now they were united in a common task. "Thank you again for your help. I will do my best to find this doctor and get his help for my mom," Alice said, clutching the card in her hand. The stranger smiled and put his hand on her shoulder. "I wish you success. Be strong and believe in yourself. We have already made the first step towards salvation," he said and went back to the hospital.

Alice remained standing on the sidewalk, holding the card in her hands. She felt excited and certain at the same time. She decided not to waste time and immediately dialed the number. She didn't get an answer, but the answering machine gave her a set of letters and numbers to enter into a search engine. After doing this, a window opened on her phone and told her to go through a verification process. She had to provide access to all her personal data and scan herself for compliance, and then she could get the address where she should look for a doctor. The woman knew how dangerous it was, but losing her mother was nothing compared to someone seeing all her notes on her phone or her forbidden Google searches. She did as she was told and started to wait. But just as she was about to save her mother's life, something happened. She noticed that cards were being thrown around the street, and a message appeared on her phone saying that these were cards with an Internet access code and those who received them would be able to live their previous life with the Internet again. Internet again? Is it a joke?

Alice's phone suddenly lost connection. She tried to connect to the Internet, but nothing worked. She noticed the movement around her and how everyone was looking at their phone screens anxiously, wondering where the Internet was. It had disappeared in the whole city. She was dumbfounded and didn't know what to do now. People were panicking and collecting these cards, desperately trying to connect to a world that no longer existed.

Alice realized that these cards were the key to her goal. She didn't waste a second and ran in their direction. But it was harder than it seemed, because the world had turned into chaos. People from all over the world were running after these cards, leaving their belongings in the middle of the streets, and very quickly the streets turned into a jungle of garbage: piles of abandoned cars, bicycles, bags and even strollers. But the worst thing was not that, it was the fact that people started fighting for these cards. They started fighting and there was even the first murder, all within the first 2 minutes of the block. Of course, everyone had their own reason for such behavior. Someone's work was completely online, someone had a long-distance love, and someone just couldn't finish a game level or post a new video, and it was all impressive. It was amazing how important the Internet was to people. Its importance was not a necessity, as it was for Alice, but in people's attitudes towards it, in their attitudes towards its importance in their lives.

This stream of thought was interrupted by the fact that Alice caught the executioner. Her happiness was boundless and happiness mixed with shock showed on her face, but again in a second it changed, because someone snatched it from her hands and ran away with a triumphant laugh. Alice's salvation was so close, so she must not give up. She ran after the boy, who was clearly weaker physically. She was sure that he was one of the gamblers who never left his room and was a teenager, so it wouldn't be difficult for her to get her card back. And so it was. The boy didn't even have time to put on normal shoes when he ran outside, so he fell and Alice quickly caught up with him. She grabbed him and quickly scanned the QR code. The Internet quickly started working. When she reconnected to the Internet, she saw a notification and the cherished address was there.

Now, with hope in her heart, Alice was preparing to meet with the doctor.

Her journey was just beginning, and she was ready to fight for her mother's life. Despite the difficulties, Alice did not lose faith and moved forward, persistently and unbreakably, with the hope of a better future.

REFLECTION

This story tells about a future that is not very possible, but rather shows exaggerated situations for emotional effect. Of course, the collapse of the Internet is possible, because with the development of modern technologies, many things become possible that we could not even think about before. But still, in my opinion, it is impossible to cause the collapse of the Internet and chaos in the world using the methods described in history. The main character's mother's illness is similar to how the story of the Corona Virus developed in the early days of China, namely that there was a doctor who told everyone about it, but no one listened to him. In general, such a situation is possible, but still it is more of a fantastic story.

ANALYSIS

This story tells about Alice, an architect who lives in a future where smart city technology flourishes and people can fly into space and explore its spaces. Alice gets a great opportunity to work together with prominent architects and build a state-of-the-art district for powerful people. However, on her journey to Brussels, the plane she is flying experiences technical problems and makes an emergency landing in a less developed area.

This story highlights two important aspects. Firstly, technological development can cause new problems and diseases for which there are no effective treatments. While technology helps improve people's quality of life, it can also create new threats to health and well-being. In this context, it is important that the development of new technologies is accompanied by adequate research and development for the effective treatment of new diseases.

Secondly, history shows how dependent people are on the Internet, and most importantly, on the information it provides access to. People are ready to kill each other for this.

Overall, Alice's story shows that technological development and access to information have a significant impact on our society and our health. It is important to strike a balance between progress and protection of people's rights and privacy, and to ensure equal access to information and health care.

CHAPTER 3: DISCIPLINED

Things are well-organized, controlled, and stable. Our characters face challenges related to societal expectations, rules, and finding a balance between privacy and security. Their stories explore the consequences of strict regulations and the trade-offs between personal freedom and the overall well-being in an increasingly regulated internet landscape.

In this orderly world, our characters encounter difficulties tied to what society expects from them and the pressure to fit in. They grapple with finding their own paths while also conforming to social norms. As they journey through this world, they face the challenge of maintaining their individuality while also fitting into predefined roles and meeting society's expectations.

Government regulations play a significant role in this world, aiming to maintain stability and uniformity. Our characters must navigate a complex set of rules that shape their interactions, pursuits, and even their own identities. They question how much personal freedom should be sacrificed for the sake of societal harmony. Privacy and security become key concerns in this world. Our characters strive to protect their personal information, trying to find a balance between staying anonymous and staying safe. They grapple with issues of surveillance, data collection, and the erosion of privacy rights in a highly connected world. They question where the boundaries lie and how to preserve the balance between personal freedom and the needs of society.

Through their stories, we explore the consequences of living in a tightly regulated society. We witness the challenges of finding equilibrium between order and personal freedom. Our characters raise important ethical questions about the balance between societal well-being and individual rights, making us reflect on the foundations of such a world. In this tapestry of narratives, our characters shed light on the intricate dance between order, control, and personal autonomy.

CHAPTER 3: DISCIPLINED

UNRAVELING THE THREADS

The exploration of designer babies' history unveils a captivating tale that intertwines the influence of artificial intelligence with human ingenuity. From the challenges faced in crafting 20-year-olds to the transformation of designing babies themselves,

BEYOND PAINTED CANVASES

Join Filou, a spirited beagle, as she breaks free from the confines of her artistic family and ascends on an extraordinary journey beyond the world of paintings and happiness. Discover the captivating encounters, unexpected friendships, and the true meaning of finding home in this heartwarming tale.

THE UNSCRIPTED HEART

Heinrich Brandt, an 81 year old German plumber from a technologically advanced utopian society, is transported to the small town of Lochristi where he rediscovers the value of human connection and wisdom in a world dominated by AI.

IN D4NG3R

In this utopian world, we follow a day in the life of robot ST3V3, who is taking care of his daughter Emily, one of the government's designer babies. He still needs to learn a lot about parenting though, because his day didn't go as planned.

PERFECT BABIES

An ideal world. Perfect people. In the pursuit of the perfect and the new, people lose something, but with the loss comes something new, and most importantly, something important is found.

THE IMPERFECT EDUCATOR

Finally fulfilling her dream she is faced with a difficult decision. Is she brave and strong enough to keep going?

CHAPTER 3: DISCIPLINED

BEYOND THE CALCULATIONS

Escaping a world of genetically designed roles, a scientist rebels against a scripted existence, seeks self-discovery, and desires to break free and live authentically.

UNRAVELING THE THREADS

A JOURNEY INTO HISTORY



(ETHAN MORGAN'S STORY)

“Today begins an extraordinary journey, a quest to uncover the tapestry of designer babies' history. In laboratories, individuals were crafted, their existence tailored to meet the unique needs of this world. Every aspect, from personalities to physical appearances, is carefully chosen by artificial intelligence. It was a grand symphony of interwoven professions, where each thread played an essential role.

As I delve deeper into historical records, social dynamics emerge. Social equality bound them together, erasing divisions and creating purpose. Gender equality shone, while mutual responsibility nurtured deep connections beyond individualism. But the history of designer babies is more than systems and structures—it weaves vibrant politics into the fabric. Economic structures ensured fundamental needs were met through redistribution and support. So, I want to unveil the history of designer babies, one story at a time.”

The journey to uncover the history of designer babies has been a fascinating one, filled with a thirst for knowledge and a pursuit of truth. Allow me to share with you the story of how I obtained this invaluable information. My quest began with extensive research, delving deep into the vast archives of historical records. Within the halls of libraries and digital databases, I meticulously combed through articles, scientific papers, and scholarly works. Each page turned, each line read, brought me closer to unraveling the complex truth of this extraordinary topic. So I started to write some stuff down:

“The story of the designer babies began to take shape in the year 2024 when the government, grappling with overpopulation and resource scarcity, implemented drastic measures to curb population growth. The decision to cease every possible pregnancy through abortion sent shockwaves through society, sparking fierce debates on ethics, morality, and the very definition of life. However, it was in the year 2030 that the government embarked on a bold experiment. With the intention of mitigating the shortcomings of the previous endeavor, they delved into the realm of designing 20-year-olds.”

This pursuit, while initially promising, revealed a profound flaw—the lack of personal history. The absence of an enigmatic identity and purpose rendered these young individuals adrift, yearning for a deeper connection to their roots and a sense of meaning in their lives.”

Armed with this knowledge, I delved deeper into the story. Determined to uncover more, I had a conversation with one of the pioneering researchers responsible for the development of designer babies. During our discussion, the researcher talked about an interesting chapter in the evolution of our extraordinary civilization. He shared the challenges they encountered when attempting to create 20-year-olds through genetic design. It became apparent that this approach fell short of their expectations, as these individuals lacked a personal history, leaving them as empty figures, with the lack of identity and purpose:

According to the researcher, crafting 20-year-olds presented a unique dilemma that demanded careful consideration. While they could manipulate physical attributes and enhance certain qualities, they struggled to infuse these individuals with a sense of personal history and identity that aligned with their chronological age. This posed a profound hurdle in their pursuit to create fully-formed adults with a rich tapestry of experiences and a genuine sense of self.

The researcher expressed concerns over the potential consequences of creating a generation devoid of the organic growth and formative years that shape one's character and purpose. Recognizing the limitations and complexities of artificially bestowing a lifetime's worth of memories and development, they realized the need for a different approach.

As the scientists went on the path of designing babies themselves, a transformation swept across the civilization. The arrival of these uniquely crafted infants breathed new life into the society, offering a sense of continuity and a connection to the natural progression of human development. No longer were individuals simply created as fully-formed adults. Instead, they experienced the journey of childhood, adolescence, and the complexities of growing up. This shift ensured that each person had a personal history and a development, shaping their identity and having a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world.

But I also wanted to go deeper into the AI decision making of it all, so I did some research and got this:

“Driven by a distinct curiosity, I went on a quest to unravel the inner workings of this AI system. I pored over scientific papers, engaged in thought-provoking discussions, and sought the insights of experts in the field. Through these efforts, I began to piece together the intricate algorithms and ethical considerations that govern the design of these extraordinary beings. It became apparent to me that the AI algorithms employed a delicate balance of statistical analysis, predictive modeling, and ethical guidelines. The aim was not only to address societal needs but also to ensure fairness, inclusivity, and respect for individual autonomy. The algorithms strive to strike a balance between optimizing the collective vision and preserving the innate desires, aspirations, and dreams of each designer baby. To gain a deeper understanding, I reached out to researchers, scientists, and those intimately involved in the development of designer babies. Through their insights, I discovered the inner workings of the AI calculations, the criteria used for designing individuals, and the ongoing efforts to refine and improve the system. It was a fascinating journey, filled with eye-opening conversations. The more I learned, the weightier the responsibility entrusted to AI became apparent. It was not merely a matter of calculations and numbers; the decisions made by AI held the power to shape the very fabric of our society. I wrestled with the ethical implications, pondering questions of bias, inequality, and the need for transparency in this pivotal process. Armed with this knowledge, I felt an undeniable sense of duty to share my findings with the world. I believed that by shining a light on the interaction between AI calculations and human agency, we could initiate meaningful discussions and foster a greater understanding of the profound impact of our choices. I aimed to promote an environment where ethical considerations and societal values are at the forefront of the designer baby narrative.”

The history of designer babies unfolds with the delicate interplay of artificial intelligence and human agency. From the early struggles with designing 20-year-olds to the advent of crafting babies themselves, this remarkable civilization has grappled with profound ethical questions and societal dynamics. Through my relentless pursuit of knowledge, I gained insights into the role of AI calculations in shaping the creation of designer babies.

The algorithms, guided by statistical analysis and ethical considerations, strive to strike a balance between societal needs and individual autonomy. Armed with this understanding, I embraced the responsibility of sharing my discoveries, sparking conversations, and advocating for an ethical and inclusive approach to designer babies. I envisioned a future where AI and human agency coexist harmoniously, shaping a world that embraces progress while honoring our shared values.

REFLECTION

The story of the history of designer babies presented in this journal entry raises intriguing questions about the plausibility of such a scenario. While the concept of designer babies, where every aspect of individuals is meticulously chosen by artificial intelligence, may seem far-fetched, advancements in genetic engineering and AI technology make it a possibility worth considering.

One reason why this story could be plausible is the rapid progress being made in the field of genetic engineering. Scientists have already made significant strides in manipulating genes and modifying the DNA of organisms, including humans, to some extent. While the story does not delve into the technical details of how designer babies are created, it is reasonable to assume that future advancements in genetic engineering could allow for precise control over physical attributes and potentially even certain personality traits. Moreover, the story emphasizes the role of artificial intelligence in the decision-making process of creating designer babies. AI algorithms, as described in the narrative, employ statistical analysis, predictive modeling, and ethical guidelines to strike a balance between societal needs and individual desires. With the ongoing development of AI systems capable of complex decision-making, it is plausible to imagine that in the future, AI could be involved in guiding the design process of individuals, taking into account a range of factors and considerations. Additionally, the story touches upon the societal dynamics and ethical considerations surrounding the concept of designer babies. It explores how the government's decision to experiment with designing individuals was influenced by concerns over overpopulation and resource scarcity. While the specific circumstances described in the story may be fictional, they reflect real-world issues that society may face in the future.

As advancements in reproductive technologies continue, it is essential to engage in thoughtful discussions about the ethical implications and potential consequences of creating designer babies. However, it is crucial to approach the concept of designer babies with caution and consider the ethical dilemmas it raises. The story highlights the limitations and challenges faced in the initial attempts to create fully-formed 20-year-olds, emphasizing the importance of personal history, identity, and purpose. These complexities underscore the need for ongoing research, reflection, and responsible decision-making to ensure that any future developments in the field are grounded in ethical considerations and prioritize individual autonomy.

In conclusion, while the concept of designer babies presented in this story may currently be speculative, it is plausible to imagine a future where genetic engineering and AI technology advance to the point where such possibilities become feasible. Exploring the potential implications and ethical considerations of designer babies is vital as we navigate the intersection of science, technology, and human agency. By critically reflecting on these ideas, we can engage in meaningful discussions, shape responsible practices, and work towards a future that balances progress with our shared values.

ANALYSIS

Ethical Considerations: One insight from this story is the exploration of the ethical considerations and societal dynamics surrounding the concept of designer babies. The narrative highlights the debates and discussions triggered by the government's decision to experiment with designing individuals, raising questions about the definition of life, the value of personal history and identity, and the potential consequences of manipulating human traits. This insight prompts us to reflect on the ethical implications of advancements in genetic engineering and AI technology, and the need for responsible decision-making that considers individual autonomy and societal values.

Technological Advancements: Another insight is the plausibility of the story based on the potential advancements in genetic engineering and artificial intelligence. The narrative hints at the progress being made in manipulating genes and DNA, as well as the role of AI algorithms in guiding the design process.

Human Agency and the Role of AI: The story also emphasizes the interplay between human agency and artificial intelligence. It highlights the delicate balance struck by AI algorithms, aiming to optimize societal needs while preserving individual desires, aspirations, and dreams. This insight prompts us to reflect on the evolving relationship between humans and AI, as well as the responsibilities associated with designing and shaping human lives. It raises questions about the influence of AI decision-making, the potential for bias and inequality, and the importance of transparency and ethical considerations in the development of designer babies.

BEYOND PAINTED CANVASES

A BEAGLE'S QUEST FOR ADVENTURE

(FILOU'S STORY)



Hey, my name is Filou. I'm a 10-year-old beagle with a pain in my hind paw. Some would say I'm just a regular dog, made of fur and loyalty. I however think I have a purpose in life, where I choose what I want to do. Unlike the designer babies, who are carefully engineered and modelled to fulfil specific roles. Just like my family, who's assigned to the role of artists. Don't get me wrong, I love my humans but sometimes I get the feeling they don't think for themselves. As if their life is too perfect. Maybe it looks like that because their purpose is to bring beauty and creativity into the world.

Each day they paint breathtaking landscapes, animals, flowers and more. Today, they are painting animals of the feline branch alongside some beautiful plants. We're standing in the sunroom where there are a lot of different plants to draw inspiration from. Such as sunflowers, sansevieria, lavender and my favourite, Lemon grass. It tastes so good. You should try it. The sun is shining warmly on my paws and I'm getting an idea. I dip my paws in a bucket of yellow paint and walk graciously all over the canvas they laid in front of me. Heather then picks it up and makes artistic sunflowers of my pawprints. She says I'm a great artist and that I will have a huge impact on the world of art. I bark happily at her and wag my tail in excitement.

When I'm about to walk to the towel to wipe my paws off, I stumble over the bucket of paint. It splashes all over the beautiful marble ground. I wag my tail and roll and play in it. It feels great to roll in the paint without a single thought in my mind. Heather smiles at me but quickly tries to get me out of the house into the garden. I however have other plans. I run through the house while John, my other owner, is chasing after me. He gets irritated quicker than Heather, which is why it's funny to tease him from time to time. We always end the chase with a friendly and reconciling hug. This time it's no different. I lick his face, he smiles at me and tells me I'm a good girl. I'm really happy in this family. However, deep within me, I want to try something different. Something that doesn't evolve painting all day, every day. I really love my humans and cherish what they do for the people but I want to explore the world.

The next day, we go on an outdoor painting session to really capture the wildlife felines. I seize this opportunity and sneak away while Heather and John are sitting in the tall grass. I'm going on an adventure to places beyond this reality of paintings and happiness. My nose guides me to the bustling streets of the city, where I experience unfamiliar scents and captivating sights. I stumble upon a park and look around me. I see a lot of different people. Two gardeners are making a beautiful sculpture in the bush. It looks like a giant elephant and other people are watching them. I also see two girls making videos of it and commenting on the piece. I think they're called influencers. Everyone is made perfectly according to their designed purpose. You can really see it shine through the behaviour of the children. Some are building castles in the sand, probably future architects. Others are arguing against each other. That's a typical sign to see that they'll become lawyers. One of the children in the park runs towards me. I think he's going to be a great vet. To my surprise, however, he speaks to me. He explains that his family are vets and that he's supposed to become one too. He bursts out in tears. Apparently he doesn't want to become a vet. This is weird, designer babies should do what they're ordered to do. He was specifically designed to be a vet. He shouldn't be thinking on his own like that. This is very dangerous for society because we would have a shortage of vets. The AI decides who becomes what and which kind of people we need on this planet. It's to save resources and make sure overpopulation doesn't happen so that everyone and everything is still in harmony.

He sees I'm thinking about his words. I however am a firm believer in this system. Even though I'm happy I'm not designed, I think it was a great idea to design humans. At least now everyone is nice towards animals. The only animals that are slaughtered, are the ones they use for food. Even then, they use the whole animal and only slaughter a new one if it's necessary. Dogs and cats aren't abandoned anymore. Horses and bulls aren't abused anymore. Everyone in the animal kingdom is happy with the designer babies. Maybe I can convince him that being a vet isn't that stupid. I bark at him and nod my head in a certain direction and start to walk. He follows my gaze and walks beside me.

A few minutes later we see a pigeon limping on the ground. I lay down next to it and nudge the pigeon with my nose. The child sighs but looks at it anyway.

He says that the bird has a broken leg and that there is no way we can help him unless we have some kind of stick to support his ankle. I look around and see a girl eating a magnum. I run to the child and take her ice-cream from her. She starts to cry and runs after me. When she sees I give it to the boy and he uses it to bind the leg of the bird, she smiles. She compliments and is thankful to the boy for saving the pigeon. This is why I love this system. She sacrificed her ice-cream for the greater good and is even thankful for it. I observe the two children and see that he's smiling. She's telling him that he's a hero for being able to save animals like that. I see the proudness in his eyes coming back and he's even explaining to her every little detail of the procedure. She seems very excited to hear all about it, just like he is to talk about it. I'm sure his hunger to help animals came back. I bark and wag my tail before leaving them.

I'm happy I could help this boy. Let's go back home. On my way back I see a cute little bakery. I open the door by jumping on the handle. It creaks open and I'm welcomed by the warm smell of freshly baked croissants. I bark at the woman behind the counter until she sees me. She gets a kind smile and hands me one of those freshly baked croissants I smelled earlier. The smell is even greater up close. I nibble on it and let out a bark of appreciation. Okay time to really go home.

When I walk back to the fields with tall grass, I see beautiful paintings. However, I don't see John and Heather. Where are they? I hear my name being called and walk further and further into the grass until I see beautiful wavy blond hair. I walk closer and see that it's Heather. I bark at her to show her I'm here. She runs towards me and calls John. When he's also with us, we fall into a tight heartfelt hug. This is where I belong, my home.

REFLECTION

This story describes a plausible future. One reason why this story could be plausible is because of the success and importance of AI technology in recent years.

AI systems are already a reality today, and their role in shaping the future is a topic of ongoing research and discussion. While we cannot predict the specific advancements that will occur in the future there are ways to predict the future with a higher probability with the help of AI. Especially with the rise of Big Data. With the proliferation of the internet, social media, and various digital platforms, there is an unprecedented amount of data available about individuals.

AI systems can gather and analyse this data to generate detailed profiles, enabling personalised recommendations and predictions. To have a good AI system, the AI would need a lot of datasets to gain enough information and learn how to predict the outcome with the most probability. This is called Machine learning. AI has made significant progress in recent years, particularly in machine learning and predictive analytics. Algorithms can now analyse large amounts of data, identify patterns, and make predictions with reasonable accuracy. This is already being done in certain sectors such as health care, where a program receives lots of data with the help of wearable devices and sensors. The technology can help medical professionals to spot certain trends that may lead to a diagnosis. It is also being used in retail, without us even knowing. Websites recommending items you might want that are based on your previous purchases. A designer baby is a genetically determined species. For example, from a group of fertilised egg cells, only those with certain genetic properties can grow. Currently, having designer babies is not a standard procedure as it is being described in my story. It is important to note that the creation of designer babies raises significant ethical, legal, and social concerns. The potential risks and consequences associated with manipulating the genetic makeup of individuals are still being debated and researched. Regulations and guidelines are in place in many countries to prevent the misuse of reproductive technologies and to ensure ethical considerations are upheld. The use of techniques like preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) during in vitro fertilisation (IVF) already exists and allows for the screening of embryos for genetic diseases or abnormalities. However, the focus of PGD is primarily on identifying and preventing serious genetic conditions rather than selecting specific traits.

ANALYSIS

Insight 1: The theme of individual purpose and autonomy: The story explores the concept of individual purpose and autonomy, contrasting the life of Filou, the beagle, with that of the "designer babies" who are created with specific roles and traits. Filou believes in choosing her own path, while the designer babies are engineered for predetermined roles. This insight delves into the question of whether a predetermined purpose diminishes the value of personal choice and fulfilment.

Insight 2: The power of creativity and art: The story highlights the role of art and creativity in the lives of Filou's owners, Heather and John. Through their paintings, they bring beauty and inspiration into the world. The story suggests that the pursuit of artistic expression can provide a sense of purpose and happiness. It explores the idea that art can have a positive impact on individuals and society as a whole.

Insight 3: The potential drawbacks and dilemmas of a controlled society: The story briefly touches upon the idea of a controlled society where AI determines people's roles and limits individual freedom. It presents the case of a child who is supposed to become a vet but resists this predestined path, expressing his desire for autonomy. This insight raises questions about the balance between societal order and personal choice, as well as the potential consequences of a system that restricts individual aspirations and passions.

THE UNSCRIPTED HEART

DEPORTATION TO LOCHRISTI

(HEINRICH BRANDT'S STORY)



In a world where everything and every aspect of human existence is meticulously crafted, Heinrich Brandt, an 81 year old German stands out as an anomaly. He was born in a time when these perfect designer babies were not even spoken of, and lived most of his life when the concept of designer babies was still in its infancy. Heinrich grew up free from the predetermined roles and calculations that govern the society today.

In this perfect utopian world the old German's days are filled with the little voluntary work that is left. This consists mostly of his plumbing jobs, a skill which he picked up on his own volition, not because some "stupid AI" determined he should do so. He finds joy in helping people with their broken pipes, and learning the network of connecting pipes that sustain the city of Düsseldorf. Occasionally he comes across some other problems, some real life problems like: should I tell my crush I like her, my husband is so distant lately, ... Whenever the neighbours suffer with these emotional problems Heinrich gives them some old man wisdom to help them get through it. In time he became a source of inspiration for the problems and imperfect aspects in this world dominated by engineered perfection. Although he does notice the neighbours ask his assistance less frequently these last few years.

Even though Heinrich is a natural speaker and has this charisma around him that attracts people. It isn't all that easy for him either. The old man misses the old times, when things were simpler and he didn't have this constant feeling of disconnection. As he walks through the streets without litter, surrounded by advanced technologies and beautiful futuristic buildings with greenery all over them. He sees people walking through the utopian society but notices that not many people are talking. The face-to-face conversations are not as prevalent as they were in the world Heinrich once knew. As he thinks about that, nostalgia overwhelms him and he can't stop reminiscing about a simpler world. He realises how he is becoming technologically illiterate and can't keep up with the technology. He sees the young people playing games on their smartwatches as they walk through the streets of Düsseldorf.

He watches a 30 year old well-dressed man effortlessly navigate his AI system. As Heinrich watches this he realises he became a relic of the past and that the generation gap has never been this big. The old man can hardly pick up the phone when someone calls him to fix a broken pipe. If they even call him anymore because nowadays the new pipe systems are so good that they never break or malfunction. He feels like he needs to pick up new technological skills to be useful to society.

He wonders when this gap became so blatant and big? When did we evolve so quickly as a species? Does his wisdom of the old world even uphold anymore? Does his knowledge hold any value? In his time things moved so slowly. This is a stark contrast to the calculated and utopian world of today. However he still remembers the first black and white tv. And the revolution when you could call someone with your rotary phone. Oh lord, how much fun he had with Frank, calling each other to talk about stupid things. As he thinks of these memories his lips start to curl, his cheeks start to rise and a faint smile appears. As he walks he notices a few robots approaching him, they have a stern look and are coloured in black. The old man has never seen these robots roam the streets in Germany. As he begins to look suspiciously, the robots start to approach him. He begins to sweat and wonder if they are looking for him, did he do something wrong? Is it the AI? As these questions fill his mind he gets knocked out cold by one of the robots. He is taken away quietly and nobody raises any questions because they are busy with their screens and know it is all predestined and controlled by the AI, the Düsseldorfers have trust in the AI.

In this surprising turn of events, Heinrich is transported to Lochristi, a small village in Belgium. With a shortage of old people in Lochristi the AI sent him here for his experience and wisdom. Heinrich doesn't get why he was transported and hates the fact that his life was thrown upside down by the AI. The first thing he thinks is that he got transported here because he didn't believe in the greater good and maybe he sacrificed too little of his time and effort for the common cause. However as he ponders this he looks back on all the times he tried to use the AI features and failed at trying the latest new gadgets. It pains his heart to think he failed this hard. He longs for the talks to Frank and Ismael, and he misses the boring and futuristic streets of Düsseldorf already.

As he strolls around in the new town of Lochristi Heinrich finds that it is way quieter than Düsseldorf and is not as technologically advanced as the big city. The first person he encounters is a 50 year old woman named Marie. Marie greets him with a warm and gentle “hello good sir, you look lost”.

Heinrich answers: “Hello young lady, my name is Heinrich and yes, I just got here and am looking around for a place to stay. I come from Düsseldorf originally.”

“I’m Marie. Nice to meet you. There must be a big difference between the big city and this small town.”

“Yes it is, I struggled a lot with the technology in the city and I can’t relate to the young folk anymore. It’s like they grew up in a totally different world.” said the old man.

As Marie kept nodding her head she answered: “I totally get what you mean I also found it hard to find my purpose in life with these kids knowing everything it’s like they don’t need me. But I can assure you it is different in Lochristi, we still cherish the wisdom of the past.”

After that conversation they both went opposite ways and Heinrich came across a young adult named Peter. Peter asked Heinrich for some help and asked how Germany looked long ago and how it changed. As Peter asked this the old German’s eyes lit up. He proceeded by giving him a short lecture about the history of Düsseldorf and Germany as a whole. Afterwards Peter notices how Heinrich couldn’t operate his GPS AI. Peter was flabbergasted by this fact, because he almost exclusively relies on what the AI says and does. He decided to help the poor old German.

The next few weeks Heinrich talked to Marie, Peter and their friends. They helped each other understand the problems they face and bonded. As Heinrich told the people of Lochristi about Düsseldorf and his life, they formed a community that cherishes the old man’s wisdom. They found solace in each other and little by little Heinrich bridged the age gap and the gap between the technologically advanced world where he came from and Lochristi. In Lochristi they appreciate his values and knowledge, this a great comfort for the old man. In this world where everything is predetermined and perfect Heinrich still suffers with a loss for purpose. Although he doesn’t know it yet the AI put him in Lochristi to rediscover his purpose in life. Slowly but surely they create an environment where technological progress coexists with the preservation of what makes us human.

Empathy, respect, emotional intelligence, human connection and wisdom will remain cornerstones. Through these values the people in Lochristi work better with the technology and work more efficiently than ever without losing what makes them human. The presence of the old man reminds the community that the value of human connection and emotions transcend the advancements of AI. But in the end the AI was correct and helped them evolve once again.

Throughout these tumultuous few weeks Heinrich learned a lot about himself, the world and life. He learned that with effort from both young and old and respect it is possible to bridge the generation gap. He taught the people around him about the importance of imperfection and human connection. Through this he found meaning in life and learned to never give up and keep believing in the human race. With this Heinrich passed the torch to the next generation.

REFLECTION:

This story is possible but almost preposterous. It is highly unlikely we will see something like this in the future. First of all there isn't any reason to clone humans, not yet at least. We are going towards a birth rate collapse with way less women having children these days. In China we see a larger part of the population being the age 50 or above. This is mostly due to the one-child policy they had. Now we see this phenomenon throughout other countries as well where less children are born. The birth rate per woman went from 5.4 in 1950 to 2.1 in 2050. This will cause the average age to grow older and young people will have to work harder and longer. Next up is the fact that Heinrich got deported to a different town. This is a nice nuance and twist in the story for the reader but is not very plausible. It isn't often in the interest of the robot to move humans to different places. We humans work better in a known and controlled environment. Very rarely are there people who adapt to new places quickly and work even more efficiently. The most probable aspect Heinrich's story in this world touches on is technological illiteracy. Old people have a harder time keeping up with technology today. It is hard for them to learn new foreign concepts and use them in their day to day life. With the new technological advancements getting ever so complicated this gap will only widen and more and more people will be viewed as technologically illiterate. After all, the people who don't have a smartphone in this day and age are just not up to date.

ANALYSIS

Generational Divide: Heinrich's internal struggle and his deportations to Lochristi emphasise the generational divide that has been enlarging through the years. Today we see this already, technologically illiterate people are still here. For old people it is really hard to learn these new gadgets. And with time these gadgets will get even more complicated and extravagant. The older generations will have to work harder to understand everything and use the new inventions correctly. In the story this is depicted by the opposing perspectives of Heinrich and Peter. This highlights the differences in experience and values these generations have.

The reliance on AI: The society where the world is created is a society that heavily relies on advanced technologies and AI. People in this world have it easy. Everything that can be automated is. The thinking is done for you by the AI, you just need to give instructions and it will learn. We see this today as well with the generative AI which has become very popular in a short time. This AI learns when you ask it something and keeps evolving.

The importance of humanity and imperfection: in this perfect world where everything is calculated and has a purpose, Heinrich is a loner with no predestined role. He struggles to adjust to things and sees the imperfection that is hidden. Amidst this rapidly changing world Heinrich embodies the importance of human connection and preserving the wisdom and experience from the past. These aspects are vital for bridging the generational divide and creating a balanced relationship.

IN D4NG3R

HOW "NOT" TO BE A PARENT

(ST3V3'S STORY)



As a robot, I spend a lot of my time reflecting on who I am, what my values are and how I can fit in with the human race. I do this while trying to distinguish my feelings, figure out my personal preferences and make new social contacts as I keep delving into meaningful conversations and looking for new experiences. But never could I have imagined that I had to help someone else with those same things, who knows even less about life than I do.

What I'm trying to say is that parenting is super tough. Definitely when you're not a human and when the baby in question was designed by the government. I signed up to be a parent of one of the designer babies, but little did I know how unintelligent and time-consuming these little, underdeveloped monsters could be. Changing their diapers, feeding them, washing and cleaning them up, playing with them, and many more. You have to help them with everything because they are very incapable on their own.

"Isn't that right, miss?"

She looked at me with big, meaningless puppy eyes, with snot coming out of her tiny nose and with her pajamas covered in drool.

"What do you need, little one?"

No response, I have yet to get a single response from her. She babbled some words, which I failed to translate to any language I know. I guess I can kiss goodbye to those 'meaningful conversations' I mentioned earlier. How can I develop my own self if I constantly have to help this baby develop. Not knowing if she would even understand me, I told her I'll get her some food and that we'll go to the city afterwards. I chose to name her Emily. That name is inspired by the latin name 'Emulus' and means eager. I hope she is as eager to learn about life as I am, hence my decision. The spoon feeding didn't take long, so only half an hour later, Emily and I were already walking through the city. Well, I was walking and Emily was being held close to my chest with the use of a baby carrier. We were on our way to the art gallery. I chose to watch art because Emily was designed to become an artist when she grows up. Being an artist can mean multiple things, so I'd like for Emily to explore and discover as many possible forms of creativity throughout her youth. Due to the long walk,

I could feel the metals and plastics on my body overheating by the time we arrived. I didn't experience any problems because of that of course, but Emily might have. So just as a precautionary measure, I decided to let Emily out of the baby carrier and crawl on the floor while I was buying the two entry tickets. The woman at the desk was kind, but took quite a while before handing me a small registration form that was required to be filled in before entering. Having placed my signature and handing the paper sheet back, I received my tickets. Wanting to playfully wave them in front of Emily to show her we got in, I noticed that she was no longer next to me. The quick scan I did of the entire entrance hall was to no avail, she was no longer here. Where could she have possibly crawled to? I could feel the panic taking control over me, as I was running down the first hallways of the gallery.

"Excuse me, did you lose something?", an older woman asked, who saw that I was nervously looking around the halls.

Out of embarrassment, I told her it was nothing, and ran the other way. Nobody could know I lost a baby. If people find out, they might think I'm unqualified to be a parent and lose custody over her. It's my duty to raise that human and I won't disappoint her. The longer she's gone, the worse the situation can get so I need to hurry up, I thought, so I began to pick up the pace. On a jogging speed, I searched the entire building, but no Emily to be seen. Could she have crawled back outside instead of further in the exposition? I could notice there was a big ruckus going on outside when I finally found my way back to the entrance hall. Could it be about Emily? I rushed outside to try and get more info, only to see everyone clustering up on the pavements and looking up at one of the tall city buildings. And there she was, crawling on a thin ledge in between two balconies of a 12-story hotel. I heard people gasping out of terror from left and right. While counting the floors, I ran towards the building, hoping I could make it on time to save her. I counted nine floors, so that's where I needed to be. The receptionist of the building seemed to be unaware of the scenario that was unfolding outside, because she was giggling while loudly chewing her piece of gum and strumming her keyboard, with the deskphone in between her ear and her shoulder. I ran past her, and heard her call me, but I didn't let that stop me from getting back my child. Making the decision between the elevator and the stairs didn't cost me any time. Elevators are always slow, and I could see on the little screen above the metal doors that it was currently on the 11th floor, which would take way too long to get down.

Since I don't experience exhaustion from physical activities, the stairs were my best option. Once I arrived on the ninth floor, I saw one door opened with a cleaning cart in front of it. This room was not in use and I could get to its balcony without interrupting any hotel guests. Having her headphones on full volume, the singing cleaning lady also seemed unaware of both the chaos outside and me sneaking through the room behind her back. Once on the balcony, I looked down to see the street I was in before, only now, most people who were there had left. I looked both ways only to realize she was no longer on any of the balconies. Just to assure she was fine, I looked down, hoping I wouldn't see a crushed baby body on a blood-covered pavement. But if that would've happened on my way up, I think I would've heard it. And as I thought, no body and no blood. I went along all the balconies and back and looked inside every room through the windows, but my efforts were in vain. I had seen a lot, that's for sure, but no Emily. As desperate as I could possibly be, I tried calming myself down while going back down the stairs towards ground level, before seeing some security guards coming to get me. My level of anxiety skyrocketed yet again, as I turned the other way back up, to try and take the elevator. I managed to get to the 11th floor in time before the guards could get to me and clicked on the 'ground floor' button before hitting the 'close doors' button several times. But it seemed as if my luck had run out again, because the elevator got stuck only a second after it started descending. My only way was up! I removed the metal plate and climbed on top of the elevator cabin. I used the ropes to climb to the 12th floor and managed to open the doors, creating an entrance to the top floor of this massive hotel. I quietly took a peek in the stairway hall, to see if the guards were still around. They were, but they hadn't noticed the elevator being blocked so they were heading downstairs. I realized it wouldn't take long for them to figure out the situation with the broken down elevator, so I thought hiding on the roof would be my best option, and so I took the very same stairs towards the roof, ignoring the signs telling me there were no guests allowed there. As I reached the rooftop I was confronted with the image of Emily floating in front of me. She was just hovering a meter above the air, making spins and twirls while playfully babbling again, like she usually does. Even though she's a designer baby, she should not be able to do such a thing as flying, or floating. "She sure hasn't done that before", I thought to myself.

Right when I picked her up, the guards from earlier stormed through the door.

“What do you think you’re doing?”, the first one yelled.

“You know you can’t be up here right, didn’t you see the signs?”, the second guy added.

Even though I thought this confrontation was nerve-wrecking, I casually played it off by replying: “Oh really, I must’ve missed that, I hope I wasn’t too much of a bother.”

“If you’re not a guest here, get out!”, the first guy commanded.

“I understand, my sincere apologies for this big misunderstanding, gentlemen.”

Trying to seem at ease, I strolled downstairs, holding Emily in my arms.

“I guess that explains how you got up there so easily. Well I hope you had a fun adventure Emily, because I sure didn’t”, I told her.

Clueless and unaware of what I had gone through, she smiled at me.

I was still confused on how she could float. Is there a flaw in her design? Is there a flaw in all the baby designs? Are there multiple flaws and if yes, how many? Does the government already know about this?

So many questions and so little answers. I guess this utopia isn’t as perfect as it seemed.

“And I guess you’re not perfect either, just like me”, I said to her, knowing she probably wouldn’t even understand.

Maybe I like that, because being something more than what your maker wanted you to be, is something to be proud of, and I know all about that. It seems the two of us are both outcast, and maybe that’s meant to be.

“I love you though, my sweet, sweet Emily.”

REFLECTION

This story is preposterous: I made this choice again based on several factors. The first one being the fact that they live in a utopian world. That in itself is unachievable. Everyone perceives a perfect world differently, so any kind of world is bound to have flaws. Second of all, there is the babystop and the designer babies. Limiting the amount of babies allowed per couple is a policy that already has been used in China for example, so is definitely a possibility, but no babies at all need to be compensated. That’s where the artificial babies come in. Creating babies using technology, choosing their personality and their talent is far from where we are right now. It might never be a thing, even though using technology to choose a baby’s eye or hair color for example is possible already.

Another thing we see is technologies like robot toys being used to keep children busy, but having an actual robot as a guardian of a child is not going to be reality any time soon. And lastly, we won't see flying children soon either.

ANALYSIS

Parenting: Parenting is a complex, multidimensional task. It is one that requires time, energy, a lot of patience and a lot of love. In this story parenting is one of the central themes. We get to see how a robot experiences it to be the parent of a human being, still incapable of communicating.

Perfection: Perfection is the defining factor of a utopia, or is it? It may look real, but is really an illusion, because flaws lurk around every corner and are bound to be discovered. In this story, we see how this utopia has its flaws and errors as well, and are being questioned by the protagonist.

Love: ST3V3's love for Emily doesn't seem clear at all in the beginning, but as he went through all this stress to get her back, he became more aware of what she meant to him. Finding out she is different even made this feeling stronger.

PERFECT BABIES A CHAIN OF DNA SIGN (ALICE ROSSI'S STORY)



In 2043, the world was a different place. It had undergone significant changes because of a major crisis in the past: social inequality was everywhere, there were not enough resources to meet people's needs, the population was aging because people were unwilling to have children in this decaying world, and there was a shortage of labor. That is why a solution was introduced at time that would solve all these problems: the design of babies was launched.

Initially, it was decided to change adults by interfering with their DNA, but this experiment ended in nothing, so it was decided to create new people in the same way, but to do it with babies. The new people who grow up like this are ideal members of society, because everyone has a place, determined by an analysis of needs, and will never be redundant.

Alice adored this world. Of course, there were problems in it, because the ideal world was being built, and people who are already there and who are not ideal have difficulties in it. But all this can be overcome for the sake of a great goal.

She worked as an architect for an Italian company and built a successful career there. Creating majestic modern buildings was her calling and she considered her contribution to the modern world to be very important. Alice, with fire in her eyes and a burning desire to do something great, brought her ideas to life every day. She created architectural masterpieces that captured people's imagination and changed the face of cities. But even in the midst of her success and achievements, her heart ached because not all people shared her passion for baby design.

Long ago, she heard rumors about a secret organization that was going to oppose baby design. These people believed that interfering with natural processes, creating new lives and defining their roles was a violation of the fundamental principles of humanity. Alice always saw it differently. She believed that the world could be changed, that an ideal social order was achievable, and that baby design was one of the ways to do so.

Fascinated by this idea, Alice began to study baby design. She studied scientific research, read books and articles, and talked to experts in the field.

Each new fact and discovery expanded her understanding of how far one could go in creating the perfect baby. She wanted to have such a perfect child. Moreover, she would like to be such an ideal person herself, but she knew that this was not possible now, and therefore her contribution could be to raise such a child.

Alice saw the creation of such new ideal people as a huge opportunity to improve people's lives. She imagined how a child could be born with healthy genes embedded through genetic technology. This meant that she could avoid inheriting genetic diseases, which was a painful topic for Alice. Her mother had a new serious illness that was poorly researched, so no one could say for sure whether it could somehow affect Alice herself, and most importantly, future generations.

In addition, she dreamed of creating babies with enhanced cognitive abilities, high levels of intelligence and creativity. Alice imagined that such children would be able to change the world and develop society to an unprecedented level, because everything perfect fascinated her.

But one day, her fears came to life and entered the real world. She realized that there were conspirators in her company who belonged to this secret organization against child design.

It wasn't obvious, because they were hiding well, but she started to notice the signs. The first time she saw a sign was a chain of DNA. She didn't put much stock in it at first, but as the organization grew, so did the signs, and it wasn't hard to continue the logical chain. The last straw came when one day, while Alice was out with her best friend. She saw the sign on her bracelet.

"Alessandra, what is that?" Alice asked, trying to keep her emotions in check.

"Oh, it's a gift from Phillip. It was our anniversary, and he gave me this beauty."

"And the sign? What does it mean?"

"It doesn't mean anything, it's just a sign. We're planning a baby in the future, so it's kind of about that, but he bought it for no reason" Alessandra tried to say this confidently, but she didn't look at Alice during this conversation, and especially she started fussing. It was all very strange, but Alice had noticed that Alessandra was acting strange for a long time. At first, she thought it was because of her engagement to Phillip, but now she realized it was something else. She did not blame her friend's fiancé, because she had never liked him.

He reminded her of her father, because in some conversations, his words were also full of rebellious moods. He repeatedly said that the government had made a mistake in the path it had chosen and that changes were needed, but these were all conversations over a bottle of wine, and Alice did not pay attention.

She decided not to let the coup take place, in case she was right in her guesses. Fortunately, thanks to her active social life, she had many friends and now she could ask one of them for help. She turned to a friend of hers who worked in the government and asked him to check the facts she had.

Two months later, everything became clear to the whole world. A conspiracy against the government and the authorities was discovered, which was aimed at abolishing the design of children through inhumane methods.

Alice's friend and her boyfriend were members of this community and Phillip even played a very important role. Alice saw Alessandra, although she refused to talk to her, and she knew she had done the right thing and had no regrets. The world needs stability and a structure that works for humanity.

REFLECTION

The story describes a world made perfect by the introduction of baby design. This means that people are born with predetermined roles and characteristics that define them from early childhood. This could include genetic changes to avoid inheriting genetic diseases, as well as improved cognitive abilities and intelligence. On the one hand, this may seem attractive, since the introduction of such technologies can bring benefits to society. Eliminating genetic diseases and improving cognitive abilities can improve people's quality of life and contribute to the development of society. But it also raises many ethical questions. One of the main issues is the disruption of natural processes. Tampering with DNA and creating new humans by designing babies can be seen as a violation of the fundamental principles of nature. Does humanity have the right to manipulate genetic inheritance and define people's roles from early childhood? Such a future is also possible for our world, but I am sure that few people will agree to such experiments, because people in the modern world are not used to absolutely trusting new technologies, let alone those that change humanity.

ANALYSIS

This story raises several important moral questions. First, it questions the ethics of genetic modifications and interference in natural processes. Should people have control over creating "ideal" people and defining their roles in society? Doesn't this violate basic principles of humanity and self-determination?

Second, the story emphasizes the importance of social justice. In a world where there was social inequality and a lack of resources, baby design could be seen as a way to solve these problems. But doesn't this lead to the creation of new types of inequality and discrimination?

Thirdly, the main character is faced with a difficult question of following her principles or friendship, and without hesitation she chooses what will benefit the world, in her opinion, and betrays her friends. It shows a person's ability to be loyal to a system and belief so much that they are willing to give up important people.

THE IMPERFECT EDUCATOR

FINDING PURPOSE AMIDST PERFECTION

(SOFIA VAN DAMME'S STORY)



I got a call from the school that had an application open for a teaching job and I'm accepted and can start next week. That's fast, I heard that the last teacher quit unexpectedly. Of course I thought about why that would have happened, but I don't care. I need the money and I want to start doing what I always wanted to do.

I pick up my backpack and walk downstairs. Today is the first day that I start working in the school. I'm kind of nervous, but also happy that I can finally fulfill my dream. My parents are sitting at the dining table when I walk in. "Good morning!" My mom says. I ignore her and grab a glass and fill it up with orange juice. Since I started studying to become a teacher our relationship went south. They didn't support me. "Are you still going to that school? Give up this rebellious attitude and do something useful with your life!" My dad says with a disappointed look on his face. "This is useful. Those kids need to learn and I help them."

"You shouldn't be in a classroom, you should be managing an entire company by now. You're wasting your time there."

"Well I don't care what you think. This is what I always wanted to do, so leave me alone and let me do my job."

They both sigh and then I leave the room. Why can't they just support me in what I do? I walk to the school. It is 15 minutes away and I could use some fresh air.

When I arrive I walk to the principal's office to introduce myself. I knock on the door and I hear a faint 'yes' from the other side. "Hello, I'm Sofia, the new teacher."

"Oh hello, welcome to my school. I'll walk you to your classroom."

We start walking through the hallways and every kid that I pass smiles at me. It freaks me out a bit. All these kids were made in a laboratory and were designed to fulfill specific tasks. "Okay, here we are!" We walk into a big classroom with 20 seats and a big projection board. It looks colorful and has a warm atmosphere.

"Are you nervous?" He asks.

"Yeah, a little bit, but it will be fine."

"Is this your first job?"

“Yes, sir. I did a few internships during college but this is my first real job.”

“Okay, well I hope you like it and that we will have you here for a long time.”

“Can I ask something?”

“Yeah sure, what do you want to know?”

“Why did the last teacher quit so fast and suddenly?”

“Well, she couldn’t handle it well. She had a lot of stress and couldn’t keep up with the curriculum.”

“Oh, I’ll do my best to keep up then.” He smiles and then he leaves the room with a quick goodbye. I figure out how to start the computer and I connect my laptop with it. Then I start up the projection. It takes me a while to figure out how it works. Luckily I came early today, that way I could try everything out and be ready before classes start.

Then music plays through the intercoms and I think that means that classes start. I hear a knock on the door. I open the door and a group of students look at me. “Can we come in?”

“Yeah of course. Sorry I closed it to try stuff out.”

“It’s okay, we can wait if you need more time.”

“No, come on in. I’m ready.” They walk in and every one of them greets me. This is just weird. This is not how classes went when I went to school. Are the designer babies so different from us? I know they’re better and more perfect but this perfect...? I introduce myself to the class and I let them ask some questions. I only got two, but that’s fine. Now it is their turn to introduce themselves. “Hello, I’m Mila and I’m predestined to become a biologist.”

“And what are your dreams and what are your hobbies?”

“I just want to become a biologist and help animals. My hobbies are doing little experiments, walking in nature and taking care of animals.”

“Okay, thank you! Let’s go to the next person.” The rest of the students were the same, there were 4 biologists, 5 doctors, 3 psychologists, 2 artists and 6 electricians. They all had the same interests and they were always linked to their job that they wanted or ment to do. During the first two hours I was corrected 5 times by different students and it made me think that I was just stupid. Finally the music started playing again, indicating that the break begins. The students leave the classroom and I sit down in my chair. This is way harder than I thought, I think I know another reason why the teacher left. When a student corrects you it is embarrassing and it makes you look like you’re dumb.

I gather my notes for the second half of the morning and eat my cookie. This is going to be so hard, but that's okay. I needed a challenge. The rest of the morning and afternoon are the same. I'm corrected for every little thing I do wrong. But they are respectful so that is something. I feel really stupid when the final music sounds. Finally my first day is over, maybe it will be easier tomorrow. I pack up my things and one student stops before my desk. "Can I help you with something?" I ask.

"I just wanted to say that you did really well on your first day! You're going to be a good teacher."

"Thank you! That's really nice to hear."

"You're welcome!" She keeps standing there looking at me like she wants to say something more but can't. "Is there something else you want to say?" I stop putting my stuff away and look at her. "I know it can be hard, we correct you all the time. But you did great. You're not a designer baby so it is not your problem. We are just more intelligent because of our DNA." I know she meant well but it hit me like a slap on my face. I'm just naturally stupid. I smile at her: "It's okay. I need to go now, because my brother Max is ordering some food."

"That is not super healthy..."

"I know, but sometimes we just do it because we think it's fun. It's something that we've been doing since I was 13 years old."

"Okay, but make sure you drink enough water!"

"Will do! See you tomorrow." She smiles and walks out the door. I let out a sigh of relief and grab my bag when the principal walks in. "Hello, how was your first day?"

"It was fine, hard and tiring but I will be fine."

"That's great, I'll let you leave then." I smile and walk out the door. I just want to cry, this was so hard. I just pictured it differently. But I can't give up yet, this is my dream.

A week passes by slowly, everyday becomes harder. By the end of it I feel useless. Why am I even teaching anymore, they already know it or they know it better than I do. I walk home with my earbuds in and listen to some music. I almost walked into two street lanterns and was almost overrun by a car. This is going great. What is happening to me...

I get home and my brother is sitting at the dining table. "Hey, sister! How was your day?"

"It was tiring, I don't know if I will be able to keep this up..."

"What happened?" He asks with a worried face.

"They just kept correcting me and I just feel so stupid. I don't even know what I'm doing there."

“Hey, you’re doing the best you can. Every night you prepare for the next day and you keep learning. It will be fine, give it time.”

“I’ve been trying but nothing is helping. I keep making little mistakes, if it’s not in my speech, it’s a mistake in my writing or something I didn’t see. There’s always something.” I throw my backpack on the ground and sit down next to Max. He gives me a slice of pizza and leans back. “You’re a great person, you know. You are trying, don’t give up now that you have realized your dream.”

“I know but it’s just so hard. I just feel useless and they know it.”

“I’m going to be honest with you. This past week I’ve seen you crumble down and seen you sadder than ever before. I’m worried, but I thought it would get better but it doesn’t, I see now.” I take a bite of the pizza. The past few days I’ve been eating up stairs or didn’t eat at all. “What should I do?”

“What do you think you need to do?”

“This doesn’t make me happy anymore. I have no energy and I’m mentally broken I think.” Will I give up my dream that I had my entire life? Is there even a use for teachers like me? Who doesn’t have a specific role in this society. They all know more than I do, they are so intelligent. Do I even need to keep existing because they are smarter than any of us, so why would we need to keep existing? It’s like they are waiting to take control and do what they do best. We are the old version of humans and now we need to make place for the 2.0 version. But I’m not giving up yet.

REFLECTION

This story is set in a possible future. It is not probable or plausible. But also not postposterous.

This is because the designer babies are already a thing today. It is possible to change some of the baby's genetics with genetic engineering. It is already possible to read parts of someone's DNA, like eye color, hair color, gender. We just took it to the next step with adding personality and profession. It is still not possible today to change someone's interests or profession because they haven't found it in the DNA yet. So for parts it is possible, but we just went way further than is possible today. In some countries there are also laws against designing babies. So that would need to change to make it possible for this future to actually happen. There are of course some ethical issues that go with this. Is it ethically okay to choose what a child will be and how they will act?

It would look like they are trying to create the perfect race. Is it okay for AI and the government to choose that? Who decides what a good person is?

This world is also in the progress of becoming a perfect world. Because the kids that are designed are perfect. They don't have flaws and are more intelligent. If there are no more people that are not designed then you create a perfect predetermined world. But because we are not there yet, you get this weird transition. People start realizing that the world is changing fast because of the predetermined roles of the designed children. In this story we see that she feels like there is no point in existing and she feels useless. What are the purposes of the people that are not designed. Are they still necessary in this society?

There are a lot of issues that go with a perfect world. The loss of autonomy in this case of a perfect world, maybe even a loss of diversity is also possible.

The hardest part of a perfect world is to keep this standing up because there is a big chance that it crumbles down to a dystopia. So for this to be our future is possible but far from probable.

ANALYSIS:

The impact of societal advancements and the fear of being useless: This story is about designer babies and the main character thinking about her value in this world. She feels useless and inadequate in comparison to the designer children. Because they correct her and they seem smarter than her. She feels like she has no added value in this world. She feels like they are waiting for her to die so that the designer children can take over. Like they are waiting to replace her.

Pursuing your passion despite opposition: We see that the main character pursues her dream of being a teacher despite her parents opinion. She believes in her dream and wants to change something in the world. She believes in her dream even with all the setbacks that she has, she wants to keep going and fulfill her dream. Maybe this is also something that she misses in the designer babies. They are all the same and she realizes that when they introduce themselves. You can wonder where their own passions are and if they will pursue them or not in the future.

The evolving nature of education: The story shows that the normal education system doesn't work for the new students.

So maybe the education system needs to change to give the students the best form of education that they can get. Maybe in this story it will evolve to a form of education that is specialized to their predetermined roles. Will it be necessary to give them a broader education or will that fall away entirely.

BEYOND THE CALCULATIONS CHALLENGING THE BOUNDARIES OF A PREDETERMINED DESTINY



(OLIVIA MEYER'S STORY)

My mind was filled with swirling thoughts and an insatiable hunger for something more. Let's face it, living in a world brimming with fellow designer babies, each tailor-made to fit a specific role, can be exhausting. We were all puppets, dancing to the tune of calculations and designs that dictated our existence. But deep within me, there was a fiery spirit yearning for self-discovery and liberation from this predetermined path.

Sure, being a scientist was deemed an honor in the eyes of society. They handed me the role on a silver platter, courtesy of some fancy AI calculations. I was supposed to uncover the universe's mysteries, contribute to civilization's progress, and all that jazz. But as days turned into weeks, and weeks into months, I couldn't shake off the suffocating feeling that my true essence was trapped within the suffocating confines of this predetermined destiny. My peers embraced their roles with such ease, finding fulfillment in their assigned professions. They were masters of their fields, their minds perfectly wired for the tasks they were designed for. Honestly, it seemed like they didn't know how to think beyond the boundaries they've known for years. They couldn't fathom breaking free from their predestined roles. But I couldn't help but wonder, was there more to life than this scripted existence? Was it even possible to break out of this mold and carve my own path, driven by my own passions and aspirations?

Every day was a monotonous cycle, spent in the laboratory, lost in experiments and research. I delved deeper into the scientific realm, my intellect thirsting for knowledge and discovery. But with each passing day, the weight of expectation bore down on my shoulders, suffocating the spark of self-discovery within me. In those rare moments of solitude, I sought refuge in the pages of books written by normal people, people who hadn't been custom-designed like me. Their stories ignited a flame of inspiration within me, tales of individuals who dared to defy expectations, who went on wild adventures and found their true purpose. I yearned for that taste of freedom, to break free from the chains of societal norms and shape my own destiny with my own damn hands.

Amidst this longing for self-discovery, I couldn't help but feel a pang of regret for the missed opportunity of having a "normal" youth. The simplicity and spontaneity of a conventional childhood seemed like a distant dream, something I could only glimpse from afar. I wondered what it would be like to experience life without the weight of responsibility constantly pressing on my shoulders. But alas, my days were structured, my work was structured, and the lives of those around me were structured too. The world was so deeply entrenched in its rigid framework that even the thought of breaking free seemed inconceivable.

And so, this is what my routine looks like:

6:00 AM	WAKE UP
6:15 AM	MORNING REFLECTION AND JOURNALING
6:30 AM	PHYSICAL EXERCISE
7:00 AM	BREAKFAST AND MINDFUL EATING
7:30 AM	SCIENTIFIC PROJECTS
12:00 PM	LUNCH BREAK
1:00 PM	SCIENTIFIC PROJECTS (AGAIN...)
4:30 PM	NATURE CONNECTION (A BREATH OF FRESH AIR IN THIS STRUCTURED WORLD)
6:00 PM	DINNER PREPARATION AND MINDFUL EATING
7:00 PM	LEISURE AND SELF-CARE (A LITTLE REBELLION IN THE FORM OF SELF-INDULGENCE)
8:30 PM	REFLECTION AND GRATITUDE (YEAH, TRYING TO FIND SOMETHING TO BE GRATEFUL FOR IN THIS STRUCTURED MESS)
9:00 PM	WIND-DOWN ROUTINE
10:00 PM	BEDTIME

I know, you might be thinking, "Oh, she doesn't even deserve to complain about this." Well, let me tell you, walk a mile in my shoes! It's not easy being the one who's constantly questioning, yearning for more, and daring to break free. This routine used to feel nice to follow. Now, it feels suffocating, like being trapped in a never-ending cycle of monotony.

One day, during my daily walk, I decided to take a different route than the one I usually do. And that day was a moment of waking up. I came across a block, turned right instead of left. A kilometer further, I saw something strange, a vibrant mural painted on the side of a dilapidated building. Its colors burst with life, defying the monotonous surroundings.

Intrigued, I approached the mural, drawn to its artistic expression. It depicted a world of imagination and freedom, far removed from the structured reality I knew.

In that moment, a spark ignited within me. The artwork spoke to my longing for self-discovery and liberation. It reminded me that there was more to life than the predetermined path I had been assigned. I wanted to be the creator, not just the observer. I wanted to paint my own story, defy expectations, and carve out a unique existence. From that day forward, my perspective shifted. I began seeking out more unconventional experiences, exploring art, music, and literature that challenged the norm. I started to experiment with different forms of self-expression, using my scientific knowledge as a foundation to create something entirely new. I sought out fellow free-thinkers who shared my desire to break free from the shackles of societal expectations.

Don't get me wrong, my thirst for knowledge is something that won't ever leave me. But... I feel like we are all meant for so much more. So much more than what we were predestined to do. And now, when I think about it... What kind of messed-up person even thought about creating babies like me? In what world is that ethical? Designing us like products, fitting us into predetermined molds, and stripping away our ability to shape our own lives. It's a sickening thought. We should have been given the freedom to discover our own paths, to stumble and make mistakes, to find our own purpose without being pre-programmed for it.

Despite all the frustration and anger, I refuse to let this system crush my spirit. I will fight tooth and nail to break free from these chains that bind me. I'll explore new avenues to unleash the creativity that's been suppressed within me. I'll challenge the norms and expectations placed upon me, and I'll find a way to carve my own destiny, one that aligns with my true desires and aspirations. So, world, brace yourself. I'm about to unleash a storm of rebellion, of self-discovery, and of reclaiming my own identity. I won't be confined to the box you've placed me in. I'll break free, and I'll show you what it truly means to live a life of purpose and authenticity.

This is a possible future. We already use AI for a grand scheme of things. AI has a significant impact on decision making across various domains. It can analyze vast amounts of data quickly, identify patterns, and generate insights that humans may overlook. AI systems can provide valuable recommendations, optimize processes, and improve efficiency in decision-making tasks. In fields such as finance and business, AI-powered algorithms help in investment strategies, risk assessment, fraud detection, and customer analysis. In healthcare, AI assists in diagnosing diseases, predicting patient outcomes, and suggesting treatment plans. AI also enhances decision making in transportation, logistics, and supply chain management by optimizing routes, predicting demand, and managing inventory.

However, the impact of AI on decision making is not without challenges. There are concerns about bias in algorithms, privacy issues, and the ethical implications of automated decision making. Transparency, fairness, and accountability in AI systems are critical to ensure responsible decision making.

Ultimately, the extent of AI's impact on decision making depends on how effectively it is integrated, regulated, and ethically deployed in different sectors. It has the potential to augment human decision making, provide valuable insights, and contribute to more informed and efficient choices.

ANALYSIS

The power of self-expression and creativity: Olivia finds solace in things that challenge the norm. This emphasizes the transformative power of self-expression and creativity as a means to break free from the monotony and discover new avenues of personal growth and fulfillment.

The importance of authenticity and purpose: The story emphasizes the significance of living a life of authenticity and purpose. It encourages individuals to challenge the predetermined roles imposed on them and find their own path, driven by their true desires and aspirations. It suggests that true fulfillment comes from aligning one's actions with their authentic self and living a life of purpose that goes beyond societal expectations.

Striking a balance between AI and human decision-making:

While AI can offer efficiency, accuracy, and data-driven insights, it is essential to strike a balance between the capabilities of AI systems and human judgment. Emphasizing human input and expertise alongside AI-generated recommendations can lead to more well-rounded and inclusive decision-making processes. It allows for the integration of subjective values, emotions, and context that AI algorithms may not fully capture.

CHAPTER 4: TRANSFORMATIVE

In the transformative world our characters will encounter the incredible transformation brought about by the internet. They will witness significant changes, revolutionary technologies, and the reshaping of social systems. Their stories will delve into the effects of new technologies, changing beliefs, and the possibility of reorganizing society.

Within this world, our characters will witness remarkable shifts that alter the way we live, work, and connect with one another. They will experience firsthand the power of the internet to revolutionize industries, disrupt traditional practices, and open up new opportunities. They will navigate through a landscape where emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, blockchain, and virtual reality become increasingly prevalent, fundamentally altering the way we interact with technology and each other. These changes go beyond technology alone. Our characters will witness a transformation of values, as society reevaluates its priorities and embraces new ways of thinking. They will explore the impact of evolving beliefs on personal identity, social structures, and the collective mindset. The internet serves as a catalyst for these shifts, facilitating the exchange of ideas, fostering diverse perspectives, and challenging long-held norms.

As our characters go on their journeys, they will confront the potential for restructuring society itself. They will witness the power of collective action and grassroots movements facilitated by the internet, as individuals come together to address social issues, advocate for change, and reshape the systems that govern our lives. They will navigate through debates surrounding privacy, digital rights, and the ethical implications of technology, as society grapples with finding a balance between innovation and the well-being of its citizens. Through their stories, our characters uncover the far-reaching impact of the internet and its ability to catalyze profound societal shifts. They explore the opportunities and challenges that arise from this rapidly evolving landscape, encouraging us to contemplate the potential for a more inclusive, interconnected, and equitable future. In this world of radical change, the internet becomes a powerful force that shapes not only technology but also the very fabric of society itself.

CHAPTER 4: TRANSFORMATIVE THREADS OF IMAGINATION

A girl can't seem to find a purpose in Eonex. Follow her on a journey to find her purpose and her home.

PAC MAN FOR A FLAT CAP

Follow Heinrich on his journey in Eonex. He plays pac-man and goes on a trip to an overgrown tower?

GAME ASSIST

Olivia creates Game Assist, an AI program that helps struggling individuals excel in Eonex's virtual world, fostering companionship, friendship and empowerment along the way.

THE CHAMBER OF REFLECTION

In the depths of Eonex, Ethan reflects on their digital existence and grapples with a lack of purpose. Each day feels repetitive and unfulfilling as they navigate the virtual realm, searching for something more meaningful.

TRANSFORMATIVE?

The world we live in has changed because we have destroyed our world. Can success in the new world replace the values we brought from our world? We need transformation, but we need to find the right kind of transformation.

RUN4W4Y

Since he's a robot, ST3V3 has to keep watch of the humans' bodies while they are in the metaverse to restore the planet's nature. ST3V3 however, feels like he doesn't belong and goes to the metaverse, knowing he'll be chased by his colleagues.

CHAPTER 4: TRANSFORMATIVE SILENT ECHOES

Set in a dystopian world on the brink of collapse, follow this courageous dog as she navigates a desolate landscape, encounters unexpected allies, and goes on an extraordinary adventure to reunite with their beloved human against the wonders and dangers of a digital realm.

THREADS OF IMAGINATION

BUILDING DREAMS IN EONEX

(SOFIA VAN DAMME'S STORY)



This is my 6th month in Eonex. I still haven't built my own bubble and I don't know if I will do it. Six months ago the real world was dying and we didn't do anything about it. We just let it crumble away, there were storms and buildings were already breaking down. Suddenly we decided to finally go into the virtual world. It was something that they have been working on for over a year now. At first it was really chaotic, they called people in and then you were put in a coma and they connected you to the Eonox. Then you spawn in the hub and from there on you're on your own. You could ask for help at the information desk but I just started exploring. I thought I would already be dead by now honestly. Because it was so unexpected, I didn't think it would have worked, but I'm still here. I don't know if I'm happy about that or sad. When I first arrived here I was scared and confused. I also lost my brother in the process of coming here. Now I have found him through a list of people and then you can click on their names and then you transport to their bubble. It took me 2 months to find him. Our weekly appointment is today. I walk from the hotel I'm staying at to the gaming center.

"Hello, what do you want to play?" My brother asks.

"It's your birthday, you decide!"

"Fine, let's play one of the classics today." He clicks on one of the army games and then it starts. I'm fully immersed in a battlefield with a gun in my hand. My brother is standing next to me and then it begins. The other side shoots first and then we start shooting back. After 15 minutes they stop spawning and we win with the most kills, like always. "Did you practice?" My brother asks me with a curious face. "Maybe a little bit. Otherwise you would have the most kills and I get more points now."

"You did great, well done!" My brother gives me a hug and we go to the next game. After 5 games both our game cards are empty. We only get five per day so that we wouldn't get addicted.

Then we walk to the food shop to get him a cake. He chooses a big one with a lot of frosting on top. It also has some chocolate sprinkles on the sides. I give some points to the cashier. We sit on a bench by a fountain in the hub, I cut out a piece and then give it to my brother. "Happy birthday!"

"Thank you! So... Did you build your bubble yet?"

"No, not yet..."

"You should build it. It's really fun to do, I promise."

"I just don't see the point of it. Why would I build my own world? We shouldn't be doing this, we should be helping the real world instead of just living here."

"We are helping it by being here."

"That's what they keep telling me. I just can't believe it, how could we help it by not being there." He shrugs and then starts eating his cake.

My brother leaves and I start walking around in the hub. People are laughing and seem really happy. I sit down on a bench close to the hotel. I don't want to go in yet. I just look at people passing by. An asian woman with a big smile on her face looks at me and comes towards me. She doesn't say anything for a few minutes. "Why are you looking so sad? Everyone else seems happy." Luckily it translates her own language immediately to mine so that I can understand her.

"I just wish I was back home."

"Did you lose your bubble?" She asks with a sad face.

"No, I mean the real world." My voice sounds slightly angry. Sometimes people forget that there is a real world. They lose themselves in this one and are happier here anyway.

"Oh, right." There is silence again. "Why are you happy?" I ask.

"I am finally not sick anymore. I used to be sick everyday. I couldn't leave my bed some days. My son needed to care for me and I didn't like that. He's nice but that shouldn't be his job, you know."

"I understand. You're never sick again?"

"No, you can't really get sick. You can die but then you respawn, but the sickness is gone. Now I can walk around again without worrying about getting sick or dying."

"I'm happy for you!" I smile at her to show her that I mean it. It must've been horrible to go through that. "Thank you, darling!" She gets back up and walks away. Maybe there are some good things in this world after all.

The next day I walk to the creating center for your bubble. Here you can build your own bubble. It's been a while since I've been here. It always gives me stress because I can't seem to find a theme that I want for my world. I don't even know what I want in my world. A guy comes in and stands next to me. "I'm sorry, but is it going to take a while, otherwise I'll come back later?"

“No, you can go.” I step back and then he sees that I don’t have a bubble yet.

“You sure? It seems like you can use the time to create your bubble.” I shake my head. “It’s fine. I don’t know what I want yet.” He chuckles and looks at me. “I know the feeling, but when I created my world it made me so happy. A place of my own, something where I can be as creative as I want to be.”

“But are you not scared that you chose the wrong theme?”

“Not really. There are so many things that you can keep changing. There are so many possibilities. There are some boundaries but that’s okay, you can still change a lot afterwards.”

“How did you choose what your bubble would be?”

“I just thought about what I liked most in the real world and used that to start my world.”

“What is your theme?”

“You wanna see it?” He smiles at me. I nod, why not. He transports us to his world. When I look closely it is all art. On the walls there is graffiti and there are so many paintings. There are also a lot of statues and sculptures. “I help the art gallery in the hub sometimes. That way they have new art every month.”

“This is beautiful!” I walk around and look at every detail in the art pieces. I spent the rest of the afternoon in that bubble and I think I haven’t even seen half of it. I’m amazed at what human creativity can do.

I see a kid skipping past me. She is laughing and some of her friends run after her. A couple is having dinner together. They all seem so happy and I start to understand why. Pain is gone and you don’t need to say goodbye to anyone because they can’t die. People can be creative and express themselves like they want to. You don’t have any obligations and most of all there is peace. That is something that we haven’t seen in a really long time in the real world.

The only thing that I’ve seen during my time on earth is that the world is a cruel place and that people can be really selfish and that the only things that people want is power and money. My parents were like that. But now I can see the good in people. This place shows the best side of people and gives everybody an equal opportunity. Everybody gets a chance to show who they are and what they want to do for society. Now I know what I want to do for my bubble.

I want a place that represents that. A place where people can come together and have a great time. Where there are no obligations and where everyone can find rest and calm.

The following morning, I embark on the journey of crafting my personal bubble.

REFLECTION

This story is about a preposterous future. It is very unlikely to happen.

It is preposterous because it is not really possible at this moment to live fully in the metaverse or virtual world. Physically this is not possible. It is possible to live more in the virtual world. But you would still need sleep and food to stay alive. Emotionally and mentally this would also be very hard. To leave everything behind to start all over. The stress of building your own sort of world. Also the fact that in this story it wasn't tried out beforehand that would also have its costs. What if it didn't work? What if people died during the process of going to the virtual world? Is it ethically okay to just send people into a virtual world without a choice? Also the fact of being in a coma doesn't mean you can get older. So that would mean that we need a method to stop aging so that we can keep living in the virtual world. People are trying to find ways to live forever or at least longer. But till this day they still have no proof of working.

Also the fact that people want to go into the virtual world for 5 years to let the real world heal is also very preposterous. The world would definitely heal. The buildings would decay and the nuclear buildings would also do that and maybe even start leaking. So the world would become radioactive. And after that the world would maybe start healing eventually but not after just 5 years. It would probably take way longer. We saw a disaster happen in Chernobyl and this was in 1986. Today it is still radioactive so that means that it will take a really long time to heal if it will even heal eventually. What we do see is that nature starts growing back, but that doesn't mean that it will be livable for humans.

What may be possible is that we will have a device that can immediately translate another language into your language. That way we could talk to anyone in the entire world.

This would solve the issue of language barrier and would make it easier for people to maybe get help when they are in a different country or to speak to local people. This could also be an opportunity to learn more about cultures from the people themselves. Also in the field of psychological help would this really help. Sometimes it is hard to get a translator and for that translator it is sometimes also hard to not be subjective. So this would also solve that issue and could help a lot more people.

ANALYSIS

Conflicting perspectives on the purpose of the virtual world:

We see 3 different perspectives: negative, health, creative. All of them are important and can't not be unseen. But through the story the main character who has a more negative worldview tries to widen her perspective. It is a conflictive perspective none of them are discarded. It is important to be realistic about the situation and see the good and the bad. It's never one of the two but it is a combination.

Discovering purpose and creativity: In this world creativity is super important, to build your own bubble and avatar. Through the story we see her struggling with finding purpose in the virtual world but the further we go and the more people she meets, she sees that we can be very creative and really choose who we want to be in that world. She also shows that she wants to have a purpose for her own bubble, that it means something in the Eonex. It suggests that finding purpose and creating a meaningful environment can contribute to a sense of happiness and contentment within the virtual world.

The allure of escapism: The story also shows that when the real world is chaotic, we want to try to escape in the virtual world instead of dealing with the problem that is occurring. It portrays how people are drawn to virtual worlds as a means of finding happiness, fulfillment, and relief from the hardships of reality.

PAC MAN FOR A FLAT CAP

THE VALUE OF EARTH

(HEINRICH BRANDT'S STORY)



As the virtual sun rose higher and higher on this fine morning we focus on the game centre in the hub. In the game centre of the virtual world of Eonex we find a wide variety of avatars. We find the popular dinosaur Yoshi of 1991, a beautiful young lady with snow white hair and a golden dress. But amidst all these extravagant avatars we see a simple old man playing pac-man in the game centre. His name is Heinrich but why is he so generic and why is he here?

"I still can't get past level 2 on this stupid game?" thought Heinrich. As he dies again Heinrich shouts: "I am too old for this shit, at this rate I'm never gonna be able to buy my favourite flat cap in the cosmetic stores." The old man has been playing pac-man from the beginning of Eonex but despite his best attempts he has never been able to get past level 2. As he thinks about a strategy to beat this game he sees the little girl next to him playing on level 52, he spontaneously gapes as he looks. She looks calm and relaxed as the ghosts chase her across the level. He can only guess at the amount of points she will get with that performance. She could probably buy 30 flat hat's. He wonders how she ever got that good at the game of pac-man because it was obviously made before she was born.

As he looks at the screen the girl notices him: "hello old man, do you like it?"

"Yes, it is almost mesmerising how good you are and how you just miss the ghosts. It is a pleasure to watch." Said the old man.

"Hahaha thank you, but I am not nearly finished. I always get good scores on pac-man".

"Really? I want to get better, do you want to help me? Euhm... What's your name? I'm Heinrich btw."

The little girl chuckled: " wow that is an old name, very fitting. I'm Olivia. Nice to meet you. I can certainly help you."

After the girl was done with the game she helped the old man get to level 5 on pac-man. She gave him some tips and tricks and they worked like a charm. He improved straight away. When Heinrich had enough points to buy his favourite flat cap they stopped and headed to the store together. The old man bought his cosmetics, but Olivia wanted to stay a little longer so they said goodbye.

On his way back from the hub to his home which is a very sombre and pale bubble, he encounters all sorts of people in different avatar forms. In this bustling virtual city he sees people dressed as zombies, robots, half-animal half-human hybrids, furry's, gaming characters like Mario and flappy bird, ... The fashion of Eonex combines functionality and self-expression, with outfits designed to adapt to the virtual environment and reflect the wearer's personality.

As he walks further while being mesmerised by these appearances he notices some suspicious people.

Heinrich follows these shady characters to a remote bubble which he assumes is created by an individual of them. The bubble is meagre and not very inviting. It gives off the vibe of an old jungle temple from the Mayans. It has strange markings everywhere and in the middle there is a big overgrown building standing tall above the trees. The fellowship was going straight towards the big building with the old man trailing right behind them. The closer they got to the building the more trees there were and the more markings they found. On almost every stone of the road a symbol was drawn. The symbol was a circle with a tree in the middle, the branches and roots intertwined with the borders of the circle. Heinrich had seen this symbol before, but he doesn't know where. As he breaks his head over this he keeps following them to the building. Once the trees were gone you could really appreciate how big and green this tower-like structure was. It had to be at least as big as the Eiffel tower in Paris. But it was not as beautiful and certainly not as inviting. It radiated this odd feeling, like you're getting cold. Although you can't die in Eonex, Heinrich was still scared when entering the abandoned building. When he was inside he came across a big open space in the middle of the tower which let light enter from the top floors, giving it this otherworldly presence. As he gets closer to the plaza the air gets colder and he hears a faint humming getting closer. It was like the distant murmurs of ghosts or pharaohs trapped in their sarcophagi. The humming kept on getting louder and louder as he approached the plaza. When he was within 30 metres of the plaza Heinrich felt a shiver down his spine. He could not help but be scared of what he was about to see.

The plaza in the middle of the building was protected by pieces of cloth hanging on the outside. Heinrich tried to put his face against the cloth to get a better view of the event.

Peering through the cloth he saw what looked like distorted and disfigured figures moving around a bonfire. With the shades of the fire they almost looked like monsters, evoking a sense of dread and evil. When the old man couldn't believe his eyes he got closer and accidentally ripped the cloth and fell on the grass in the plaza. His heart stopped, how could he be this clumsy and show himself to these weird and ominous cult of entities? While sweating he slowly removed the cloth and raised his head to see whatever awaited him. As he looked up he felt relief and an instant smile was made. Heinrich was laughing like he never had in years: "hahahaha, I can't believe I was scared. What are all of you young and joyful avatars doing in this bleak and eerie place? I thought this was some kind of cult." A young man offered his hand: "Don't worry old man, we want to celebrate the time we have and think of how the world will look like when we return. That is why this building is so overgrown and intertwined with nature."

"Oh I see that does make sense, but why did it look like there were monsters here?" said the old man while still laughing.

Another middle aged lady answered with a smile: "We want to embrace nature and live like we would when we got back in the world. We call ourselves the remembrance of society and this building is "The Spire" it's our meeting place."

The young man spoke again: "Don't you miss the feeling of wind on your skin, the real sun warming up your body. The feeling of ants crawling through your hair as you lie in the field? We do and that is why we get together around this bonfire to simulate these feelings and bond with like-minded people."

Heinrich felt relief and happiness: "Do there are also people who think of it like that huh. Well if you don't mind I'm kind of choked and feeling all kinds of emotions. Thank you for this encounter, I hope I will see you again but I really want to get back to my porch and smoke from the pipe if you don't mind."

1 week later Heinrich sat on his porch smoking a pipe and drinking some coffee while hearing the birds, he created himself, whistling a nice and soothing melody. He was writing a speech to give to the remembrance of society:

"Eonex is a utopian place in all facets of life. You can be and wear whatever you desire. You can play games all day long and hang with friends you would never meet in the physical world. Death is a foreign concept and you can even make your "dream world" or bubble to live in. It truly looks like paradise.

But being here for so long makes me wish for the little things on Earth: Leaves falling on my head, peeing against a tree in the forest, wind blowing the hair in my face, ... I want to experience these things once again, I yearn for the tangible world. Therefore I hope you accept me to the remembrance of society.

Humbly

The old white German man with a pipe."

REFLECTION

This story is possible, it isn't preposterous or plausible, but also not probable it is between these dimensions of the future's cone. Some aspects of the world and story are very real and could happen in the near future, while others are not as realistic. Eonex, a digital world resembling the metaverse shows a real possibility of how the metaverse could influence our lives in the future. The creativity this gives to the users, and the ability to imagine anything are the powers and benefits that are being highlighted throughout this story. But also the downside. It could be a real addiction to escape from the real world and live in a metaverse. You will lose the sense of reality and yourself. A lot of speculation has been done about this topic and will not stop any time soon. The reason why the human race went to Eonex is also a hot topic. Climate change is all over the news in recent times. It is a hot topic today. Eliminating the influence of humans on nature has been speculated. There have been researches of what the impact could be and how nature would heal itself. It is a real solution, letting nature run its course would eventually resolve the problems we face today. However this would take a long time. The reason why this isn't looked at any further is because we haven't thought of a way to put the humans in hibernation, or put ourselves to sleep for a prolonged period of time. In movies this has been explored broadly, however the real science hasn't clarified this yet.

ANALYSIS:

Interconnectedness: Through the interactions Heinrich has with other avatars in Eonex the interconnectedness of this world is highlighted. The possibilities of making friends from all over the world is a special characteristic of this world. Everyone is living in the same world and has the same experiences. Through the customization of these characters, it is even hard to know how old they are, or where they come from. The options are limitless, so you can either hide or embrace your appearance.

Finding purpose and fulfilment: In most Utopian worlds people struggle with finding purpose in their lives. The world is perfect, so you can't really help the world or make a huge impact. This is also true in Eonex. This is depicted through Heinrich's desire for a flat cap. Despite not being able to die and having the possibility to do nothing, Heinrich sets a goal for himself. Beat level 2 and get a flat cap. The bubble also represents this desire for purpose, through the creation of one's bubble they find passion and pursue a beautiful bubble.

Realism and Escapism: The latter half of the story explores the concept of escapism and the need for the reel-life experience which they once had. In history we can see that people had this same drive, like the renaissance. In this period artists grasped back at the values of ancient times. There will always be a conservative groups that grasp at the values of old times no matter how good the world they live in is or seems. This is depicted with the "remembrance of society" group. Their yearning for wind on their skin and the scent of nature makes them want to go back. This is in stark contrast to another group of people in Eonex who like it so much that they don't see the need to go back and want to stay forever. This balance between the 2 groups and the idea of escapism and the richness of reality are depicted in Heinrich's story.

GAME ASSIST

FORGING BONDS IN EONEX

(OLIVIA MEYER'S STORY)



In the digital realm of Eonex, I found myself immersed in a world of endless possibilities. I delved into the intricate mechanics and rules that governed this virtual reality, constantly seeking to push its boundaries further. As I explored the vibrant landscape of Eonex, I couldn't help but notice that not everyone possessed the skills needed to excel in the mini-games that were a central part of this digital realm. Determined to help my fellow inhabitants, I harnessed my intellect and passion to create something truly special. Drawing inspiration from my scientific research, I developed a program called "Game Assist." This ingenious creation utilized cutting-edge artificial intelligence algorithms to analyze the gameplay patterns of struggling individuals and offer personalized suggestions and assistance. My aim was to level the playing field and bring joy to those who felt discouraged.

Later on, I also considered the importance of personal boundaries within this digital realm. While Eonex fostered connections and community, I understood that privacy and security were paramount. To address this concern, I decided to integrate a feature that allowed individuals to block unwanted visitors from their bubbles. This solution provided users with the ability to create a safe haven within their digital domains. Through a simple yet effective interface, inhabitants could manage their privacy settings and block anyone whose presence they found undesirable. This feature ensured that Eonex remained a place where individuals could freely express themselves and cultivate a sense of security.

One day, while strolling through the bustling Hub, I noticed a girl named Ava, her brows furrowed in frustration as she struggled with a challenging game. Her avatar mirrored her exasperation, and my heart went out to her. With a rush of courage, I approached her with a warm smile, captivated by her presence. "Hey, Ava! I noticed you're having a tough time with this game," I said. "Mind if I offer you a little assistance?". Ava looked up, surprise and hope flickering in her eyes. "Oh, hi. I guess I could use some help. I just can't seem to get the hang of it." I nodded understandingly. "Don't worry, it can be tricky at first. That's where my program, Game Assist, comes in.

It analyzes your gameplay patterns and offers personalized suggestions to help you improve. Would you like me to activate it for you?". Ava's face lit up with a mixture of curiosity and anticipation. "Really? That would be amazing!". With a few quick taps on my device, Game Assist was activated for Ava. It began analyzing her gameplay, identifying areas where she struggled and providing real-time tips and guidance. As she followed its suggestions, Ava's avatar gradually started to perform better, gaining confidence with each passing moment.

Seeing her progress and renewed sense of determination filled me with joy. Ava and I spent hours together, exploring different games and overcoming challenges as a team. There were moments when my heart fluttered, an experience of connection like none I had ever encountered before. I shared my knowledge and strategies, empowering Ava to improve her skills and unleash her true potential. Along the way, we developed a strong bond of friendship, finding solace in our shared experiences. As we continued our journey in Eonex, I realized the importance of not only helping others directly but also fostering a supportive community. I organized weekly game workshops in The Hub, inviting those who struggled with the games to come together and learn from one another. Through these gatherings, friendships formed, and a sense of camaraderie blossomed as we supported and encouraged each other to overcome obstacles. During one of these workshops, Ava stood at the center, showcasing her newfound expertise. She confidently shared her strategies and techniques with the group, inspiring others to believe in their own abilities. It was a beautiful moment of empowerment and growth, a testament to the transformative power of connection and support. Throughout it all, I remained dedicated to my mission of making Eonex an inclusive and empowering place for all. Game Assist continued to evolve, offering even more personalized assistance and strategies tailored to each individual's needs. It became a valuable tool not only for those struggling with the games but also for those seeking to enhance their skills further.

I couldn't help but feel immense gratitude for having found a true companion in Eonex. The journey had been challenging, and finding connection had always been difficult for me. But Ava was a source of strength and joy to me that transcended the boundaries of the digital realm. The warmth and support I received from her filled a void in my heart and brought a newfound happiness that extended beyond the gaming adventures.

As the years passed, Ava and I became known as the dynamic duo of Eonex, continuing to uplift others and spread the spirit of inclusivity. Together, we shared the belief that true success and fulfillment in Eonex lay not solely in personal achievements but in the support and growth of the entire community. Each day presented new opportunities to help others, challenge the limits of what is possible, and explore the profound philosophical questions that lay at the core of this digital civilization. With every interaction, I learned that true progress and happiness come not just from personal gain, but from the connections we forge and the positive impact we have on the lives of others.

In the remarkable world of Eonex, where personal growth and environmental healing coexist, I embrace the eternal allure of the immersive digital realm while never forgetting the power of compassion, friendship, and the potential of technology to create a better world for all. I still long to be back in the real world, but up here I feel like the possibilities to put imagination at use are limitless.

REFLECTION

This is a preposterous future meaning that the chances of us, human beings, being in a united coma and our minds living in a digital realm seems rather unlikely to happen. While VR (virtual reality) technology has advanced significantly in the past few years, the ability to create fully immersive digital worlds that can sustain human consciousness for an extended period of time is not possible just yet. While there are ongoing advancements in neuroscience, the idea of transferring a person's consciousness into a digital realm is speculative at this very moment. It is, of course, impossible to predict what will happen in the futures. Perhaps, this can be reality for our descendants.

ANALYSIS

The transformative power of technology: The story highlights how innovative technologies, such as the AI program Game Assist, can positively impact individuals' lives by providing personalized assistance and leveling the playing field in virtual environments. It showcases the potential for technology to empower and uplift individuals, fostering inclusivity and personal growth.

The significance community: The story emphasizes the importance of genuine connections and support within both virtual and real-life communities.

Olivia and Ava's companionship demonstrates the profound impact that meaningful relationships can have in overcoming challenges, inspiring personal development, and creating a sense of belonging.

The balance between personal boundaries and connection: The integration of a privacy feature within Game Assist reflects the recognition of the need for personal boundaries in digital spaces. It highlights the importance of cultivating a safe and secure environment where individuals can freely express themselves, while also fostering connections and collaborative growth within a supportive community.

THE CHAMBER OF REFLECTION

NAVIGATING PURPOSE IN A DIGITAL WORLD



(ETHAN MORGAN'S STORY)

In the depths of Eonex, I continue to grapple with the lack of purpose that consumes my digital existence. Each passing day feels like a monotonous loop, as I navigate through the virtual realm in search of something more profound. The allure of mini-games and points that once captivated me now feel empty, failing to fill the void within my soul. As I wander through The Hub, surrounded by activity and avatars with the latest cosmetic enhancements, I yearn for a connection that transcends the superficiality of this digital world. The once-seamless translations that erased language barriers now feel like empty words, lacking the depth and authenticity of genuine human interaction.

I find myself drawn to the group of scientists who dedicate themselves to understanding the rules and mechanics that govern the real world. Their pursuit of knowledge offers a glimmer of hope against the digital haze. Perhaps, within their research lies the key to bridging the gap between Eonex and the world we left behind. Yet, the questions continue. Is this digital realm an escape from the troubles of our physical reality, or does it hold the potential to heal and transform our world? Can we find purpose and meaning in this synthetic existence, or are we destined to remain lost in simulations?

When I first got into Eonex, I found myself immersed in it, a digital realm booming with possibilities. As I created my avatar and went into this virtual landscape, I was filled with excitement and anticipation. This was my chance to build my own world, a personal bubble that reflected my creativity and imagination. But as the days turned into weeks and weeks into months, I realized something concerning. I lacked purpose. The inspiration that fueled my journey had dimmed. What was the point of creating a world if I didn't know what I wanted to express? I wandered through The Hub, observing the creations of fellow inhabitants. Their bubbles were so vibrant and alive, filled with unique experiences and ideas. Yet, I couldn't help but feel a sense of uncertainty. How could I compete with their worlds when I couldn't even define my own vision? I sought peace in the art gallery worlds of Eonex.

Each exhibit showcased the creativity of its inhabitants, inviting me to explore their interpretations of reality. But with each step, my own doubts grew stronger. The desire to create something meaningful destroyed me, but the words and images remained vague. How could I craft a world that captured the essence of my being when I couldn't even grasp it myself? The digital canvas before me felt vast and intimidating, a blank slate waiting for inspiration to strike. But inspiration seemed to escape me.

I approached Paul, a fellow inhabitant I've gone to the art exhibitions with in The Hub. There was something in his gaze that mirrored my own sense of purposelessness. It was as if he carried the weight of the same questions that plagued my thoughts. "Paul," I began, "I've been grappling with something lately, and I can't help but feel lost in this vast digital realm." He looked at me, his eyes filled with curiosity. "I know exactly what you mean," he replied, his voice tinged with a hint of frustration. "We have this incredible opportunity to create our own worlds, to shape our realities, but where do we find the purpose in it all? How do we make something meaningful?"

His words resonated deeply within me, as if he had verbalized the very thoughts that swirled in my mind. It was a relief to know that I wasn't alone in this struggle, that someone else understood the doubts I faced. "I've been wandering through The Hub, witnessing the wonders and creativity of others," I confessed. "But with each passing day, I feel the weight of my own insecurity. I don't know where to begin, what story to tell, or how to make my mark in this digital world." Paul nodded; his expression thoughtful. "I believe many of us share that same feeling," he said. "We have been given this canvas, but it's up to us to find the colors that define our own narratives. It's not an easy task, but perhaps the journey itself is what holds the key to our purpose." His words sparked a glimmer of hope within me. Perhaps the search for purpose wasn't about finding a definitive answer but rather embracing the process of exploration and self-discovery. "You're right," I replied, a newfound determination seeping into my voice. "We don't need to rush this journey. We can take our time, experiment, and learn from the stories and experiences of others. Maybe in doing so, we'll uncover the inspiration and purpose we seek." Paul smiled, a flicker of excitement dancing in his eyes. "Let's explore together, my friend," he said, extending a hand towards me. "Let's wander through this digital realm, share our struggles, and celebrate our triumphs."

Who knows, we might just find the spark we've been searching for." I shook his hand, a sense of camaraderie and anticipation filling the space between us. Together, we go on a shared quest, determined to find our purpose. And as we ventured forth, I couldn't help but feel a glimmer of hope that, in this journey with Paul, I had found a kindred spirit who would walk alongside me, supporting and inspiring me every step of the way.

We delved deeper into the notion of building a world for people who, like us, were grappling with a sense of purposelessness. We saw an opportunity to create a space where individuals could find solace, inspiration, and a sense of belonging. With a newfound determination, we started brainstorming and sketching the outlines of our envisioned world. During one of our brainstorming sessions, I found myself reflecting on the notion of purpose and its place in our fast-paced, ever-evolving society. "You know, Paul," I began, my voice tinged with a hint of uncertainty, "some might view our project as a bit... hippie-ish, don't you think? A world dedicated to introspection and self-discovery, it might seem too idealistic, almost out of touch with reality." But then again, what is reality anymore? We wanted our world to be a place of reflection and self-discovery, where people could explore their inner landscapes and unlock their hidden passions. We called it "The Chamber of Reflection", named after a song we both really liked. The Chamber of Reflection would be a serene and ethereal realm, with vast landscapes adorned with shimmering lakes, towering mountains, and ancient forests. It would provide a sanctuary for those seeking to understand themselves and find their purpose.

We wanted it to be a place where people could come together, share their journeys, and support one another. We envisioned gathering spots where individuals could engage in meaningful conversations, collaborate on creative projects, and offer guidance to those in need. We knew that building such a world would require time, dedication, and the contributions of many. We started reaching out to like-minded individuals within The Hub, inviting them to join our endeavor. The response was overwhelming. People resonated with our vision and were eager to be part of something meaningful. Together, we formed a close-knit team, each person bringing their unique skills and perspectives to the table. Some were skilled architects who could design intricate landscapes, while others were master storytellers capable of weaving captivating narratives.

We began hosting regular meetings in The Hub, exchanging ideas, refining our concept, and outlining the details of The Chamber of Reflection. As the word spread, more and more people became intrigued by our project. They too longed for a sense of purpose and wanted to contribute their talents. The Chamber of Reflection became a symbol of hope, drawing people who sought meaning in a world that often felt lack of it. We were amazed by the collective creativity and resilience of our fellow inhabitants. They poured their hearts and souls into shaping this digital realm, each contribution adding a unique element to the masterpiece we were creating. And as our world took shape, it became more than just a world—it became a statement to the power of collaboration and the human spirit. It was a testament to our shared quest for purpose and the realization that, sometimes, finding our own meaning meant helping others find theirs.

As I looked upon the virtual landscape before me, I couldn't help but feel an overwhelming sense of relief. "In this digital realm," I said, "we have discovered the power of connection and the resilience of the human spirit. It may be a world of bits and pixels, but it feels undeniably real because it is fueled by our shared experiences, our genuine interactions, and our commitment to growth. The Chamber of Reflection has become our home—a place where we can freely explore, create, and find the purpose we seek." As the sun began to set on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the virtual landscape, I knew that our journey had come full circle. From the uncertainty and search for purpose, Paul and I had forged a path that led not only to our own self-discovery but to a community of similar spirits. In this digital realm, we had found our home, a place that resonated with the very depths of our being. And as we ventured forth into the ever-expanding horizons of The Chamber, I carried within me the profound realization that the world we had built was not just a digital escape, but a reminder that home is not always a physical place but can reside within the connections we make and the journeys we go upon.

REFLECTION

The story presents a narrative that explores the struggles of individuals within a digital realm and their eventual creation of a meaningful world called "The Chamber of Reflection." While the story may present a somewhat idealistic view of digital existence, it does highlight some positive aspects worth acknowledging.

One positive aspect of the story is the emphasis on the power of human connection and collaboration within the digital realm. The protagonist and their companion, Paul, come together with like-minded individuals to create a world that resonates with their shared search for purpose. This highlights the potential for online communities to bring together individuals with common interests and aspirations, fostering a sense of belonging and support. The creation of "The Chamber of Reflection" as a space for introspection and self-discovery also carries a positive message. It recognizes the importance of personal growth and understanding oneself in a world that can sometimes feel overwhelming and chaotic. By providing a serene and ethereal realm for individuals to explore their inner landscapes, the story suggests that digital spaces can offer opportunities for self-reflection and the unlocking of hidden passions.

The story also touches on the idea of finding inspiration and learning from the experiences of others within the digital realm. Through interactions with fellow inhabitants and the exchange of ideas, the protagonist and Paul gain new perspectives and insights, expanding their own creative horizons. This highlights the potential for virtual environments to serve as platforms for knowledge-sharing, collaboration, and personal development. Furthermore, the story illustrates the resilience and creativity of individuals within the digital realm. As more people become intrigued by the project, they contribute their talents and skills to the creation of The Chamber of Reflection. This collective effort showcases the transformative power of collaboration, demonstrating how a shared vision can inspire people to come together and create something meaningful. While the story may present an optimistic view of digital existence, it does highlight the potential for virtual communities to foster connections, personal growth, and collaboration. By embracing the positive aspects of digital realms, individuals can explore new ideas, find support, and contribute to a collective endeavor. However, it is important to maintain a balanced perspective and recognize that digital existence should not replace or overshadow real-world experiences and relationships. Striking a balance between the virtual and physical realms is crucial for a holistic and fulfilling life.

ANALYSIS:

The search for purpose and meaning transcends digital realms:

The protagonist's struggle with a lack of purpose within the virtual world reflects a universal human experience. It reminds us that the quest for purpose extends beyond the boundaries of technology and that genuine fulfillment comes from connecting with others and exploring our own inner landscapes.

Collaboration and shared experiences: The story emphasizes the power of collaboration and the exchange of ideas within the digital realm. By coming together with like-minded individuals, the protagonist and their companions find inspiration, support, and collective strength. This highlights the potential for online communities to facilitate personal growth and create meaningful projects through shared experiences.

Digital realms can offer spaces for self-reflection and creative exploration: The creation of "The Chamber of Reflection" in the story demonstrates the potential of digital environments to provide spaces for introspection, self-discovery, and the pursuit of personal passions. It suggests that virtual platforms can serve as tools for self-exploration and offer opportunities to unleash creativity in ways that may be limited in the physical world.

TRANSFORMATIVE?

THE MAIN THING IN THE ALICE'S LIFE

(ALICE ROSSI'S STORY)



Alice, a 27-year-old Italian architect, was one of the most influential people in the Eonex world. Her bubble was a true masterpiece - a perfect representation of her creativity and vision. Thanks to her extraordinary abilities and innovative projects, Alice earned a lot of recognition and success in the world of architecture at Eonex. However, suddenly her bubble of success began to collapse when her father, who had been imprisoned for his involvement in the group that brought the world to ruin, returned to her life. His disobedience to authority and desire to change the world had brought only suffering and chaos, but now in the new world, no one cared about prisoners because everyone wanted a new life. While in prison, the father realized his mistake and decided to find a way to contact his daughter and correct his actions. Alice was stunned and saddened when she found out about her father's return. She tried to forget about him and build a new life in this ideal world where the boundaries of reality were blurred. But now she had to face her fears and give him a chance to redeem himself. After much deliberation, Alice met him in this digital space. They saw each other in the form of their avatars. Alice felt a mixture of emotions - anger, sadness, and at the same time a thirst to understand her father. They began to communicate, sharing their thoughts and feelings.

Gradually, meeting after meeting, Alice began to realize that her father was indeed undergoing a transformation. He realized the mistakes of his youth and wanted to correct them. His experience in prison gave him a new perspective on life, the meaning of freedom and the importance of reconciliation. As Alice spent more time with her father, she discovered new aspects of her existence in the Eonex world. She realized that success and popularity did not determine her true value. Her father's love and understanding turned out to be the most important thing for her.

One day, as Alice and her father were walking through the incredibly beautiful park at Eonex, an amazing transformation took place. The sky was illuminated with a bright light, and the ecosystem began to undergo a magnificent revival.

TRANSFORMATIVE?

CHAPTER 4: TRANSFORMATIVE

Plants came to life, the water became clean, and the air was filled with the scents of flowers. The world was finding its way back to health, and this event reinforced Alice's belief in the power of transformation.

Since then, Alice and her father have continued to communicate and explore the world of Eonex together. They created a joint project in which they combined their knowledge and creativity to create a new architectural bubble that embodied their shared vision of the world.

This bubble became a symbol of reconciliation and hope for the future. Its design was influential and impressive, but even more so, it reflected a new harmony between people and nature. Alice realized that it was important not only to create beauty, but also to be kind to the environment, something they had forgotten in their real world and had begun to forget here.

When they presented their bubble at the exhibition, it became the main star of the show. People enthusiastically explored every corner of it, admiring the beauty and symbolism embodied in this work.

The popularity of Alice and her bubble began to grow day by day. She became a famous architect who embodies the concept of the harmonious coexistence of man and nature in her projects. Her innovative ideas became an example for other architects who wanted to change the world for the better.

Thus, Alice, together with her father, changed not only their lives, but also contributed to the creation of a new world where people were more conscious and in tune with nature. Their work together became an example of how transformation and coherence can lead to positive changes in the world, and therefore she saw her next goal as changing the real world for the better, but this was already a new page in her story.

REFLECTION

This story about Alice and her father leads to a number of critical reflections on the future world. Initially, Alice lived in the ideal world of Eonex, where the concept of reality was erased. She achieved success in her profession as an architect and was recognized as a world authority thanks to her innovative projects.

However, when her father returned, Alice began to understand that she had forgotten her true values and lost touch with her past.

This connection is not only about family values, but also about the connection with our humanity, with nature and the world that gave us life. People lived in the world and then destroyed it, which shows their ungratefulness and now they are building a new world, but where is the guarantee that everything will not be the same with it?

Therefore, the story of the main character forces us to start thinking about our existence and important things.

The future depicted in this story is possible with a big probability, because people are already at the stage of destroying the world and at the stage of finding a new one like Elon Musk with the desire to colonize Mars.

ANALYSIS

This story offers a romantic vision of a possible future, but at the same time has several critical aspects.

First, the development of technologies and virtual worlds to such an extent that the boundaries of reality are blurred is extremely unlikely. Although technological progress may surprise us and realize some of the ideas that arise in fantasy stories, becoming a digital space so realistic that you can meet your father in the form of avatars is unlikely. Such a future requires significant breakthroughs in the field of virtual reality and interactive interfaces.

Second, the restoration aspect of the park's ecosystem in Eonex due to the presence of Alice and her father is sketchy and unrealistic. The idea that the mere presence of a few people could cause such a miracle is unfounded. Given the complexity of the problem of environmental pollution and climate change, solving such problems requires deep systemic changes, long-term efforts and joint coordination at the international level.

Third, although the story shows the transformation of Alice and her father, it is presented in a simplified form. The characters are seen in a positive light, and their motivations and frustrations are little explored.

TRANSFORMATIVE?

CHAPTER 4: TRANSFORMATIVE

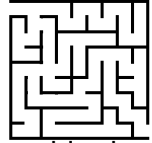
Realistic characters have many contradictions, internal conflicts and development that are absent in this story.

Overall, although this story has elements of fantasy and romance, many of the events and premises are unrealistic and improbable. It offers a simple idea of reconciliation, progress and changing the world, but does not take into account the complexities that accompany such processes in reality.

RUN4W4Y

CHASE THROUGH THE METAVERSE

(ST3V3'S STORY)



As the days went by, my motivation ran dry. I knew I would miss interactions with humans before they went to their new homes, but I never thought I would feel this lonely. I'm really the only robot that can communicate and experience on a level humans can, unlike my colleagues. Some of them are just a bunch of brainless robots, following orders and just staying in their boring routine of taking care of their bodies. While others are a lot smarter, but can't form opinions of their own, so aren't good at making conversation. They don't even have time or interest in doing so in the first place. I missed excitement, I missed social contact, I missed the humans. Driven by that deep longing for human connection and excitement, I devised a plan to enter Eonex. After examining the ground plan of the massive complex we were in carefully, I figured out a route to a room with a backup capsule I can easily reach without being seen by any of the other robots that were hovering around.

I carried out the plan I had in my head effortlessly, and I was in the capsule in no time. I locked both the room and the capsule and mounted the big headset. Right before a bright light flashed me into a state of unconsciousness, I could hear the alarm going off.

"Welcome to Eonex, your new home!", the guide said right after I opened my eyes in what seemed to be a highly technological building.

"I will assist you in crafting your own world, in showing you around, in explaining the rules of this world and with answering any questions you have."

Since I had heard how the world works even before most of the humans went in, I know what I had to do. And I was on a time limit, because I heard the alarm go off in the real world right before I entered Eonex. That must mean that the system had detected my capsule being used. It'll only be a matter of minutes before some other robots jump into emergency capsules and come to Eonex themselves to capture me and bring me back.

I knew that I had to earn points by playing minigames. That way I could buy cosmetics to change the way I look and become almost unrecognizable. After that, I can just head into someone else's self made bubble, knowing that creating my own would take a while.

I ran outside and was greeted with a big crowd of people going in every possible direction. It was at this point that it hit me: this is the reason I'm here. These people are what brings me here. I was so happy to finally feel like I am where I belong. I saw a bunch of people laughing with each other, some people telling others what they have created or seen in other worlds, while others were just enjoying the busy atmosphere. Everyone seemed happy, and I felt the same way. I snapped out of that feeling however, when I heard the zooming sound of someone entering Eonex: the guards! I made a run for it and followed the signs towards the place named 'arcade' where I could earn points. I went into a huge, not to miss, casino looking building where I was greeted again by the same guide.

"Choose your lobby, please"

An endless list of lobby numbers appeared in front of me. Every lobby number also included the amount of people currently in that lobby. That way, people could avoid waits. But I didn't select a lobby number, because the robots that wanted me out of this metaverse could easily track my location, figure out my lobby number and catch me while I'm playing an arcade game. Once I'm caught, it's over. Once I die in the hub or someone's world, I respawn in the entrance hall since I haven't created my own world yet, and they'll be waiting for me as well, and it will be over too. I had to come up with a different plan.

"Let's skip step 1, being the step where I earn points in the arcade for a disguise, and go to step 2 right away", I said to myself. This meant jumping into someone else's world. I ran through the city and found my way to the house of bubbles, where people create their own world or visit someone else's, using information I got from a big city map I saw earlier. There I could select different people's homeworld based on different categories. Without having the slightest clue of what I was doing, I clicked on the tab which ranked the worlds in popularity on the floating hologrammed screen in front of me, scrolled down a bit and selected a random one. There was no time for hesitation or reading info on the worlds before entering them, because the robots would catch up. They could track me in the hub, and see what lobbies I was in and they could also see what world I was currently located in, but they couldn't see where exactly in that world I was. So I simply had to hide in someone's world and I'd be safe. I had now found myself in a colorful room with a blue ghost floating in front of me.

"Hello, welcome to Jack's world! To enter, each person is required to read and sign these rules, terms and conditions."

I signed them without reading though, for obvious reasons. The second I finished writing my name, the ghost disappeared and the colorful room vanished. I now found myself in an unknown place with black tiles, surrounded by golden, engraved walls three times my height and a purple sky above me. I was in the middle of a hallway, so I could choose between going left and right. This must be a maze, I thought to myself.

I curiously walked towards one end, and now found myself at another crossroad. I chose to go left but got stopped by this eerie and uncomfortable feeling I had. The walls started changing and moving like the waves of an ocean. Trying to ignore this slight dizziness, I took a few steps forward until I locked eyes with what I assumed created this weird atmosphere. In front of me, stood a big lion-looking monster with huge bat wings, a cobra for a tail and razor sharp fangs, claws and teeth. It slightly squinted its eyes, which were so dark they looked like portals to the cosmos, before running my way. Frozen in place, I watched as it launched at me, before a mysterious figure shoved me out of the way, onto another path. As I was laying on the ground and looking at the lion-like creature who had placed its claws deep into the ground I was at a second ago, a moving wall separated me and my rescuer from the beast. While standing up, I finally took the time to see who exactly saved me from the beast. It was an old, nearly bald guy with a long white beard and a wooden staff, wearing nothing more than a piece of cloth covering the parts that should be covered.

“You have a pretty slow reaction speed, kid. You need those here in Jack’s maze”, he told me with a high pitched but cracked voice. “Nice robot skin you have there”, he added.

I didn’t bother correcting him and explaining that this was my actual appearance. Instead I thanked him for pushing me out of the way. My reaction speed was indeed slow, but I had excellent orientation. I knew that we were on the same path I spawned on. On our way to the other end of the path, the old man told me about why and how he got his current cosmetic skin, how long he had been in this maze and what kind of things he had seen here before. He explained that the only way out of this place was finding the exit, and the more you died, the harder the maze got. In this world, instead of respawning in your own world or in the hub, you’ll respawn back somewhere in this maze.

“So you’ve just been wandering around here for months and you can’t get out?”

“Well, unless you die 10 times, then you get kicked out and can never enter this maze again. If you complete it however, the owner will give you a unique ‘maze’ badge. “I would do anything for it”, he explained, “and I can’t die now because this is my last life, so my last attempt at getting that badge”. I didn’t want to tell him my full story, but I did explain to him how I can’t die 10 times either, because then I’d have to go back to somewhere I absolutely didn’t want to be, and if I had known about these rules, I wouldn’t have entered.

“Didn’t you read the terms and conditions”, he asked with a disappointed face.

I laughed off his question. As he realized I probably hadn’t and was about to ask me why, we heard three robot guards enter the maze behind us.

I made a run for it, not even thinking about whether the old man would follow me or not.

I took a turn right, then went left on a T-junction, went straight at another crossroad and went left again after, now making me unaware of where we were, regardless of my good orientation. The old man seemed to have kept up with me, he was right behind. The black tiles stopped and continued fifteen meters further and three meters higher from the end we were now standing at. In between was a big pool filled with lava, making me question whether Jake, the builder of this maze, was a nine year old with a very wild fantasy who was not afraid to hide his ideas, or a genius adult who thought long and hard about every choice he made while shaping this place. At the end of both paths was a 2 meter high pole which was tightly connected with a rope. This made us able to climb from one end to another, crossing the lava pit. There was no time for stalling, so I began my climb over the lava and so did the old man. But shortly after, the robots that were chasing us had found a way to the same room, and started their ascend as well. I successfully made my way across, but the old man was not fast enough, and the robots had almost caught up to him over halfway the rope. He looked at me and wished me good luck, before taking a pocket knife from under his piece of cloth and cutting the rope, making both him and the robots fall in the lava. They died, and must have respawned somewhere else in the maze. Except for the old man, he used all his lives and now got kicked out of this world for good. He gave up his chance at getting the one thing he wanted just to help me out. He barely even knew who I was.

I couldn’t leave his loss in vain, so I went deeper into the maze, looking for the exit and ready for the many dangers I was about to encounter.

REFLECTION

This story is preposterous, The reasoning behind that result lies in several aspects again. Even though climate change is a problem we're already struggling with, placing the entirety of humanity in a cosmetic coma and making them travel into the metaverse isn't a possible solution. The reason behind this is that this plan is only effective as a longtime solution. But people can't be in a cosmetic coma for that long. Therefore this method wouldn't work in a way to restore the environment. Creating an entire metaverse might be possible with future knowledge however, but its uses would be for entertainment or education rather than its use in this story.

ANALYSIS

Alienation: This is the feeling that you're out of place and don't belong. Our main character ST3V3 experiences this as he is surrounded by robots that are not as well-developed as he is. He craves human contact and wants to refind that community in which he feels home. This feeling causes him to run away.

Loneliness: Feelings of alienations often come with feelings of loneliness too. This is also mainly due to lack of conversation and interactions. In the story, we see how ST3V3 doesn't really have any friends, family or acquaintances.

Sacrifice: Sacrificing oneself is usually killing oneself for someone's else's benefit. Here we see a stranger take their own life (at least sort of) to protect our protagonist ST3V3. The reason for doing so is often out of empathy, which is the case here.

SILENT ECHOES

A CANINE'S QUEST FOR REUNION

(FILOU'S STORY)



We're in the year 2043, the world is grappling with environmental catastrophe. There are multiple hurricanes, floods and droughts everywhere. The once vibrant ecosystems, now hang by a thread and humanity embarked on their journey in Eonex, a digital world. They did this by going into a coma voluntarily. Due to this, I find myself alone in a desolated landscape. The once bustling streets were empty and nature had begun reclaiming its territory. As a dog, I loved going on daily walks with my human but this is different. It's like exploring a whole other world and it's so quiet. No sounds of loud bikers, cars honking, neighbours who play a stupid song, leaf blowers, people having arguments... To be honest this sounds nice but there is also the other side. Such as no sounds of people chatting, laughter of children, beautiful singing, whistling, whispers, music... I really miss these sounds. However, there are also other nice sounds that are now reoccurring. I can hear the birds chirping, the rain falling and the other animals talking. It's actually quite peaceful.

I roam and navigate through the remnants of human civilization. I feel so small in this large city. There are a lot of huge buildings with cracks in them. Sometimes I see a little plant starting to sprout through the cracks. The contrast of the green against the grey buildings is beautiful to the eye. It's like a symbol of resurrection of the planet. It's taking back its territory.

The clouds are grey and I have a feeling it'll start raining soon. I'll have to find shelter amidst the ruins but first let's try and find some food while it's still dry. I lurk around the city and find a store. The billboard outside is still flickering. This used to be a busy store. A lot of people used to come in and out every day. I still remember the days I used to wait outside on Rose, my owner. All the people that would pet me or try to call me. Some even gave me a treat if no one was watching and then called me a good girl. I miss those days. I miss the interactions with everyone. The person I miss the most is Rose. She adopted me when I was five and we lived a good happy life. Even though I'm lonely and miss my human from time to time, I know she's in a better place. I'm very curious however to what she's doing and what's possible in this digital world.

For all I know, they can do everything there. Maybe she's chasing squirrels or walking in the park. It could also be possible that she found herself a wife. She really deserves the world. That's why we were incredibly sad when we heard I couldn't come with her. Something about "we don't need real animals in this new world". We hugged each other and said that one day we'll see each other back. Although I'm not so sure about this anymore.

I walk into the store and try to find my canned food. It's chicken flavoured with a hint of salt. It's very delicious, if you ask me. I pry through the aisles and find my food on the top shelf. I see a broomstick in the corner of my eye and try to take it with my mouth. It's a bit heavy on one side but I manage to knock over my food. Luckily for me, it spilled a bit. I gnaw on the can and try to open the crack a little more. I feel a sting in my upper lip but at least the food is in my reach. I nibble on my food and go back outside. I want to explore the city a bit more before it rains heavily.

I feel one droplet of water running alongside my nose. I feel another one. It starts to rain more. I look up into the sky and feel the rain on my fur. It melts away all my troubles and I forget about the world and everything that's happening. Until I hear a sound. It sounds as if metal is crashing against something. If there's something I've learned from movies, it's to never approach the sound. But curiosity kills the dog. I sneak up in a dark moody alley until I hear it clearly. It's just around this corner. I see a rather strange occurrence. There is a humanoid robot, skimping a tin can against the wall. He looks rather sad. It's weird to see him here because he should be looking over the people that are in coma. To go or not to go, that's the question. I want to know why he's here but I'm also a little scared of his reaction.

Just when I'm about to walk away, I stumble over one of the tin cans he threw in the alley. He looks my way and I look at him. We both stare into each other's eyes. It is as if we're both hypnotised and don't dare to move. Eventually I walk slowly closer to him. He reaches for me and puts his hand in front of my nose. I sniff it and wag my tail as a sign of peace. He smiles warmly at me and starts talking about his problems. "I don't like taking care of these humans. We always have to do the same thing over and over again. As if there's no end to this madness. Why is it that we have to take care of them, while they are the reason this planet is doomed.

I guess they try to restore it with this “amazing” plan of theirs. But why do we have to suffer?” He looks at me as if he has hope that I’ll say something. I just stare back at him quietly. To be fair I could talk to him if I wanted to because I have a high-tech collar that makes me able to speak. But I’m just not quite sure how I could comfort him. I didn’t really understand this whole “the planet is dying” vibe. I was just happy I could go on walks with Rose. I mean sure, sometimes it was super-hot and the next day it would snow like crazy. But I didn’t know it was because of the planet dying. I really don’t want to believe Rose and the other humans could ever do such a thing to the world. “I know, I know, you probably didn’t really think about all of this stuff. But look at you know. You’re just as miserable as me. We’re sitting in the rain in a dark gloomy alley. Both abandoned from society. At least you’re free to do whatever you want.” He looks back at the wall. I couldn’t stay quiet anymore. “Hey for the record, I didn’t want to be here either. I wanted to be with Rose. My human, my everything. I’m happy to listen to your story but you can’t just be rude to me for no reason. I also don’t like it here but I try to make the best of the situation. I’ve roamed many cities and talked to many different pets, who are in the same situation as I am. It really helps to talk to each other about our experiences and to try to see the positive in every situation. To live in the present and not in the past.” I said to him. He scoffed. “It’s easier said than done. You are loved by the humans, we’re just being used. And I know that I shouldn’t be dwelling in the past but it’s difficult. Especially when I know I could also be in Eonex.” What he said really perked up my ears. Entering Eonex? Could I really? “Ha, it’s not as if we could enter whenever we wanted.” For a minute I felt hope until I heard those words. What was I thinking? As if I could see Rose again. I really need to stop thinking about what could happen, especially if it’s not possible. “I mean at least not legally.” He said in a dark tone. “What do you mean? We can go to Eonex?” I asked. I tried to hide the excitement in my voice because I didn’t want to sound desperate. My tail however was wagging extremely fast. “Yes, not long ago, another robot named ST3V3 entered Eonex. There is however a price we’ll have to pay,” he said. I’m so curious about what it could be. He continued his story by telling me that they are now hunting ST3V3 down. Apparently it is illegal for robots to cross to Eonex. “I think you’ll be safe though. Because you’re a dog, you won’t be noticed in there. Just make sure you blend in with the metaverse dogs.” This is starting to sound remarkably interesting. “Okay so what do I need to do?,” I asked.

He explained that we just need to go to this secret underground lab where we can put ourselves in a coma to enter Eonex. On that note, we begin our journey to the underground lab.

At first I didn't see the gate. It is covered in vines and the robot, who's called M1CH43L, rips some of them off. The opening is just big enough for us to enter but small enough so outsiders won't come in. Before we enter the lab, he warns me: "Nobody will find us here. We will be free in Eonex if we blend in enough. There is only one significant risk. When the time comes for everyone to leave Eonex and come back to earth, there is a possibility we can't come back. Because for us to come back, they'll need to open up our capsules. However, nobody knows where we are because it's a secret lab that they used to experiment with. It's kind of illegal but it is safe.... I think." His words scare me. If Rose comes back to earth, I also want to be able to go back with her. "I can trust my Rose, so I'm just going to tell her where our capsules are. She won't snitch I promise. Then we'll also be able to come back to this planet." He seems to analyse my words and I can see he's sceptical. Which I understand because he doesn't know Rose yet. I look determined in his eyes and hope he can see how sincere I am. After a while he agrees and says it's indeed a clever idea. But if she ever were to tell on us, he'd kill me. I have faith in Rose though. I trust her with my life.

I look around the room and see the two capsules we're supposed to get in. They're standing in the corner. There is a thick layer of dust on all the equipment. M1CH43L touches and pushes some buttons, the lights and screens turn on. The lights of the capsules flicker at first but then just stay on. Now the exciting but also scary part can begin. We enter the capsules one by one. It feels cold inside and before I even realise it, I see a bright white light. The only thing that's on my mind is my mission to find Rose.

In this story we see the city being abandoned without human intervention and taken over by nature. This is called passive rewilding and it is very plausible this will happen. In cities where no human activity occurs, nature can naturally take over the abandoned spaces, with plants and animals gradually returning to the area. There are significant ecological benefits associated with rewilding abandoned cities. It promotes biodiversity, helping to restore and preserve diverse ecosystems. Rewilding also contributes to mitigating the effects of climate change and enhancing the overall health of local ecosystems. This is also the reason why humans go into a coma in this story. By creating green spaces and allowing nature to reclaim these areas, cities can become more sustainable and resilient. In conclusion, passive rewilding allows for the natural reclamation of abandoned areas by plants and animals. It offers ecological benefits, including biodiversity promotion, climate change mitigation, and improved ecosystem health. By embracing rewilding, cities can become more sustainable and resilient in the face of environmental challenges.

Another item we talk about in this story is to go to Eonex. In this story, human civilization does this by laying in a capsule and going into a coma. This is very preposterous, it also makes this whole story that way. The plan is to stay in Eonex for a few years and then wake up from the coma. The bodies however need to be preserved for those years. A method that could be used here is cryopreservation. This method could be possible. Cryopreservation is a process that involves preserving living tissues at extremely low temperatures for extended periods. This technique has gained significant attention from researchers worldwide, especially in the field of organ preservation. Cryopreservation finds crucial applications, particularly in the medical field.

Cryoprotectants protect cells and tissues during freezing and thawing, but excessive use can be harmful. Minimising their usage is crucial for preserving cell integrity. Cryopreservation is vital for organ and tissue preservation in medicine. It is a well-established method for preserving various cells and tissues, including sperm, oocytes, and embryonic tissues. In the future, cryopreservation will continue to be indispensable in medicine and various industries. Ongoing research aims to improve effectiveness and safety through new cryoprotectant development and optimised freezing and thawing methods.

In this story we also talk about a high-tech dog collar. This collar translates the barks into human speech. This collar is rather probable. However, dog collars claiming to translate barks into human speech are debated for their accuracy. Examples include the BowLingual and Petpuls collar.

Ongoing AI research aims to understand dog communication better and develop more accurate methods of interaction. There are some ethical concerns about the usage of this technology for dog speech translation. It raises questions of anthropomorphism and potential disruption of natural communication and bonding. There could be potential benefits, such as enhancing the understanding of dogs' needs and emotions, improving communication and overall quality of life for owners and pets.

ANALYSIS

The devastating effects of environmental catastrophe: The story paints a picture of a world in 2043 grappling with multiple hurricanes, floods, and droughts. The once vibrant ecosystems are on the verge of collapse, and humanity has sought refuge in a digital world, leaving behind a desolate landscape. This highlights the consequences of environmental neglect and the urgent need for sustainable practices to prevent such catastrophes.

The contrasting experiences of solitude and peacefulness: The protagonist, a dog, finds itself alone in the abandoned city. While the absence of human noise brings a sense of peace and tranquillity, there is also a yearning for the sounds of human interaction and connection. This duality reflects the complexity of emotions and experiences in a world drastically transformed by environmental crises.

The allure of escape and hope for a better future: The discovery of the possibility to enter Eonex, the digital world, offers a glimmer of hope amidst the desolation. The protagonist and the robot, M1CH43L, embark on a journey to a secret underground lab to enter Eonex, seeking an escape from their current predicament. The desire for a better future, reunion with loved ones, and the potential for a new beginning drive their actions, showcasing the resilience and optimism that can emerge even in the face of dire circumstances.

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